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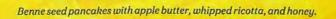
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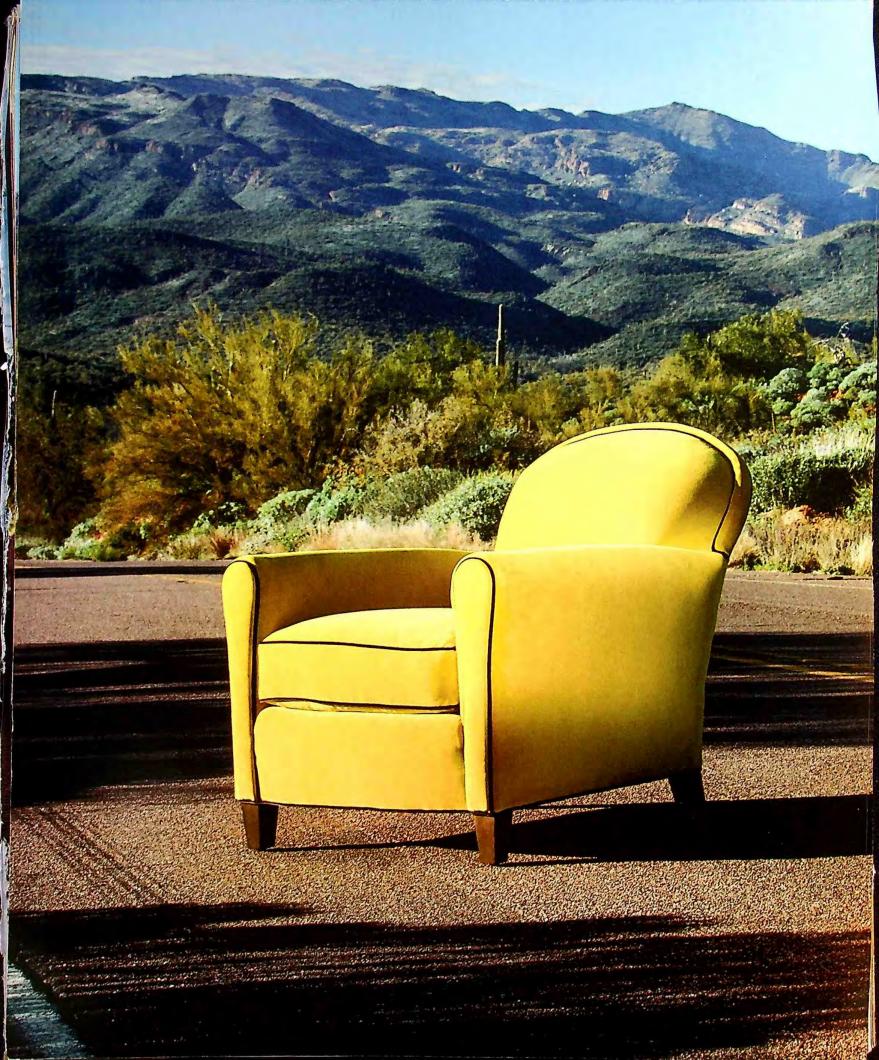
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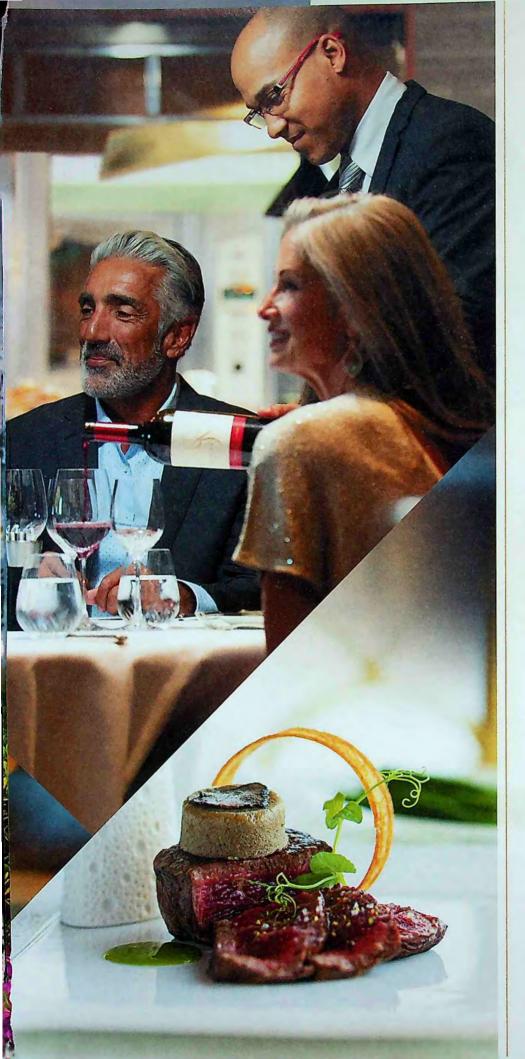
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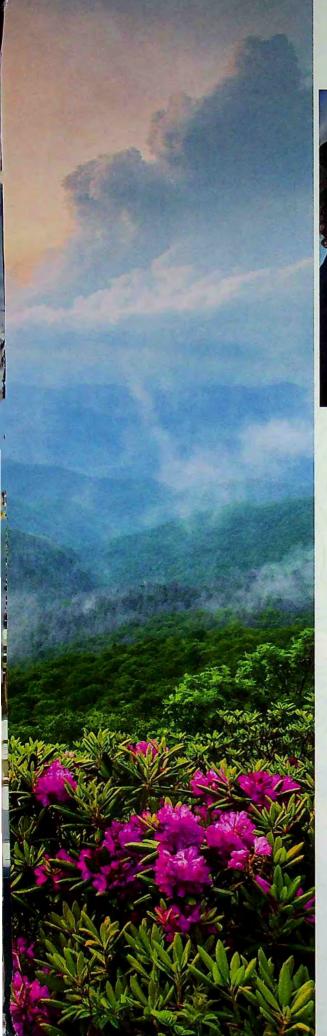
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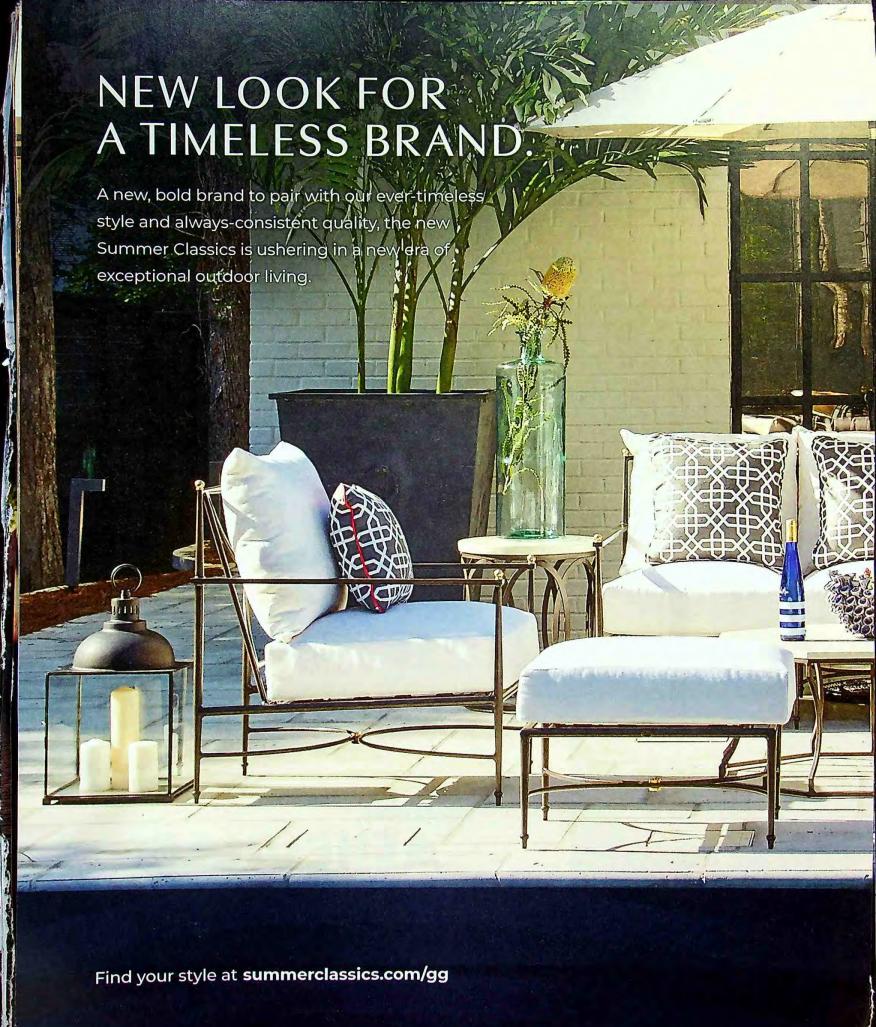
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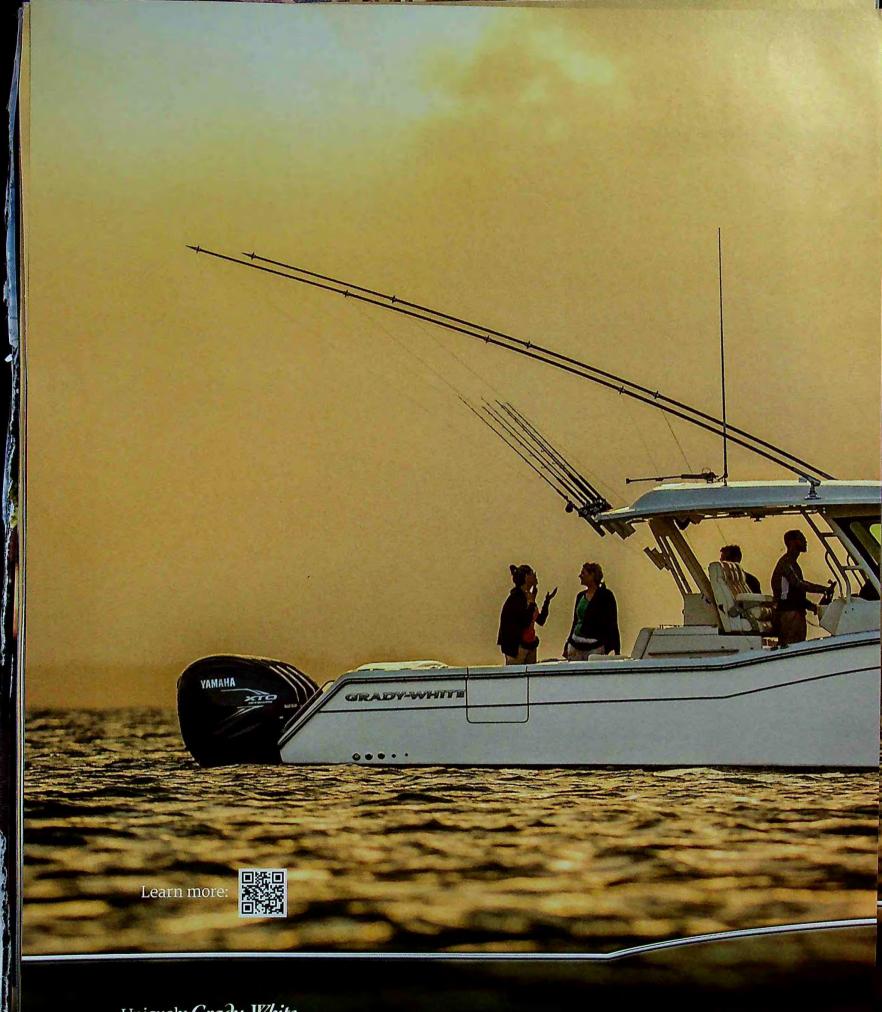
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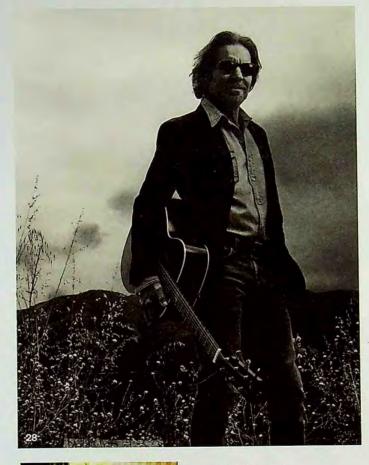
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A stack of benne seed pancakes from Dano and Bethany Heinze of Vern's, in Charleston, South Carolina. Photograph by Johnny Autry. Food and prop styling by Charlotte Autry.





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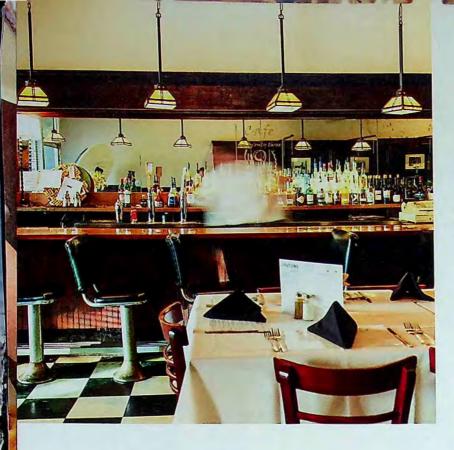
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THERMADOR CONVRERIGERATION



Alabama's Road Trip-Worthy Restaurants

ENJOY AN AUTHENTIC SENSE OF WELCOME ON THIS DESTINATION DINING RIDE THROUGH THE YELLOWHAMMER STATE

he first thing to know about Alabama dining is that a warm welcome is its calling card. Hospitality here comes from an authentic place, a sit-and-stay-aspell attitude that permeates every eatery, from casual meat-and-threes to fine-dining experiences. Pair this true sense of friendliness with award-winning food and you have a recipe for a great destination dining road trip.

See this firsthand as you begin your drive down the state in Decatur, home of Big Bob Gibson Bar-B-Q. The smoked-meat institution is still serving up brick pit chicken and world-championship pulled pork shoulder in its ninety-eighth year in operation. It's said that the original "Big Bob Gibson never met a stranger," and that same warm reception continues today. In fact, it's an ongoing themewherever you find yourself eating, from the Highland Rim to the Coastal Plain. It's why locals love Cafe 123. Located three and a half hours southeast, in Opelika, the place has been relished by loyal customers for its convivial *Cheers* atmosphere for two decades, a scene made all the better by French favorites like decadent coq au vin served next to Southern classics such as shrimp and crispy fried grits.

Alabama's come one, come all culinary sensibility can be found in even the most innovative kitchens. Tucked in the southeastern

From top: Cafe 123
in Opelika pairs
Southern cuisine
with French-inspired
dishes; Dothan's KBC
restaurant strictly
follows a "We don't do
fussy" philosophy.

corner of the state, Dothan's KBC (chef and proprietor Kelsey Barnard Clark's initials) encourages visitors to relax by following a simple principle: "We don't do fussy." What it does do is serve bold flavors that meld Southern heritage with fresh interpretations. "Lo Country" hush puppies share menu space with furikake fries.

A destination dining road trip through Alabama will have you asking yourself, why buy another drive-through burger when you can try food full of character and soul at the family-friendly Ox Kitchen in Fairhope, and eat the signature Ox Burger with oxtail gravy? Or, why treat the kids to an ice cream chain when you can head back north to Birmingham's Big Spoon Creamery, an artisanal ice cream shop known for wildly inventive scoops of pistachio rose or lemon mint along with key lime yuzu ice cream sandwiches and decadent brûléed banana splits?

Alabamians know that a great shared meal hinges on encouraging comfort, and Jesse's on the Bay in the must-visit oasis of Gulf Shores, overlooking Bon Secour Bay, does this effortlessly. The newly opened casual fine-dining space is all about making you feel at home with American classics like thirty-day dry-aged rib-eye steaks and diver scallops.

Even pizza, that universally beloved dish, comes with a side of Alabama cordiality. At Pizza Grace in downtown Birmingham, the name says it all. The pizzeria's motto? "Courteous goodwill." Its radical kindness ethos seems to be working. Pizza Grace was named a Best New Restaurant semifinalist on this year's James Beard Awards list, and serves brilliantly original pies. Consider its braised leg of lamb, harissa, Swiss chard, mozzarella, pickled red onion, and lemon turmeric yogurt pizza. Or the very Southern Papa Benton, an ode to Allan Benton, owner of Benton's Smoky Mountain Country Hams, that comes topped with salt-cured pork, fonduta, fingerling potatoes, and garlic confit.

And while you're in Birmingham, conclude the tour by paying homage to the patron chef of the state: Frank Stitt. Since 1982, the Cullman native has been turning heads and tables with his award-winning Birmingham restaurants, including Bottega, which was, naturally, nominated for a 2023 James Beard Award in, you guessed it, Outstanding Hospitality. Need we say more?

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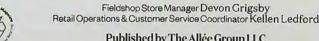
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Tomato Tales

GROWING—AND RELISHING—ONE OF THE SOUTH'S GREAT SUMMER GIFTS

uring my time in New York City as a magazine editor, I found ways to keep myself rooted in the natural world. I fished on weekends in Long Island Sound (and even occasionally before work in the Hudson River), spread birdseed on my windowsill so the grackles would fill my room with bird chatter in the morning and drown out the ever-present sirens and the wailing of street preachers, and even gardened. Well, gardened might be a stretch But each summer in a show of even more

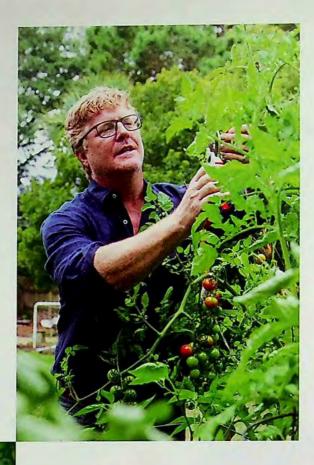
preachers, and even gardened. Well, gardened might be a stretch. But each summer, in a show of even more optimism than required of your average gardener, I'd plant a few veggies in pots on my tenth-floor fire escape.

It wasn't an easy go for the plants. Surrounding apartment buildings often blotted out the sun. Every now and then someone in one of the two floors above me would empty out a mop bucket, raining soapywater down on my crop. The only plant that actually thrived—make that survived—was the jalapeño.

These days I always keep a jalapeño plant or two in my garden box here in Charleston, South Carolina, as an homage to the plant that

granted me a harvest in the Big Apple. But my heart lies with my tomato plants, especially the heirlooms. This year I went deep on the classics: the Cherokee Purple (so named for its Cherokee heritage and gorgeous color) and the Mortgage Lifter (which originated in West Virginiain the 1930s and grows such big fruit that selling them helped pay off the house of the man who developed them). There's also a more modern variety, the Celebrity tomato, whose name is a bit of a turnoff for me. But so far it has lived up to its billing—producing large, crack-free, firm fruit ideal for slicing. A classic red cherry rounds out the crop because I love nothing more than eating one or two warm from the sun while I'm working in the garden.

I've also gone deep on tomato YouTube. (So many



experts! So many opinions!) One lady likes to crack an egg and bury it under her seedlings; the calcium in the eggshell might be beneficial. One fellow takes his electric toothbrush and vibrates each flower stem to ensure (100 percent!) pollination. Probably works but so does a good old-fashioned shake of the flowering branch. If you ask me, they're all vying for clicks, not fruit.

What I love about gardening is that it's about as far from a spectator sport as one can get. The showmanship comes when you haul your harvest indoors. I follow my friend Jason Stan-

hope's lead. When not in his garden, Stanhope is the acclaimed executive chef at FIG in Charleston, where the tomato tarte tatin is legendary. However, here's his tomato game plan at home: "When they reach that window of perfection, we like soft white bread, lots of mayonnaise, sea salt, black pepper, and a brush of sherry vinegar," he says. "The bread is only there to keep your fingers clean."

For me, the next best thing is sliding a trio of hefty tomatoes into a paper bag and dropping them off on a neighbor's doorstep. If anything says Southern summer more than that, I haven't found it.

DAVID DIBENEDETTO

Senior Vice President & Editor in Chief

From top:
DiBenedetto pruning
a cherry tomato plant;
a Cherokee Purple on
the vine; jalapeños
and banana peppers
ready for pickling.

Pickled Peppers

Making the most of a bumper crop

Unlike in my NYC days, I often find myself under a mound of jalapeños. Thankfully, my wife, Jenny, and I have struck upon a preparation we love. To a pot add 1 cup white distilled vinegar, 1cup water, 3 or 4 smashed garlic cloves, 4tbsp.sugar, and 2 tbsp. kosher salt. Bring to a boil, Remove from stove and stir in 15 to 20 sliced jalapeños and banana peppers (remove seeds and pith for less heat). Allow to cool, then transfer to a mason jar and store in the fridge. Add them to anything from breakfast eggs totacos.





The Art in Craft Whiskey

BOB DYLAN'S HEAVEN'S DOOR WHISKEY REIMAGINES THE SPIRIT EXPERIENCE IN KENTUCKY

drank Kentucky bourbon in Pleasureville." While that sounds like a lyric in a Bob Dylan song, it actually has a different relationship to the legendary artist. It's a phrase that will likely be said by many visitors beginning in September when they step inside the folk rock legend's new Heaven's Door Distillery in the aptly named town of Pleasureville, Kentucky.

Never one to shy away from a new form of creative expression, Heaven's Door is now the owner of a 160-acre property along Six Mile Creek, a plot that originally belonged to Squire Boone—Daniel Boone's brother. Under the direction of esteemed distiller Ken Pierce, the new Heaven's Door Distillery site features two still-houses in Western horse barns in addition to a series





of outbuildings, including an eighteenth-century gristmill, two eighteenth-century cabins, and a Moravian barn, all restored to their original glory.

"Dylan is a voracious reader and a big history buff," Marc Bushala, Heaven's Door CEO, says. "The authentic history of Six Mile Creek resonated with him." Considering Dylan's restless spirit, it will surprise no one that this is only part of the Heaven's Door Kentucky story.

The brand has also opened the doors to a multimedia art experience in Louisville's NuLu district. Phase one is the Last Refuge, a retrofitted church turned bar that will showcase "every whiskey we can get our hands on," Bushala says, along with live musical performances and a neighboring art gallery for the prolific folk star's work.

"Everyone knows that Dylan is an amazing musician, but the fact that he's an accomplished visual artist, we find that much more interesting," Bushala says. Next door to the Last Refuge, Zephyr Gallery will display Dylan's found object, welded sculptures and cinematic paintings for visitors to enjoy in person.

In a state where you can spend days learning about the history and science of distilling, the brand's Kentucky arrival is about celebrating the art in the craft, an approach as free-spirited as Heaven's Door's iconic founder.

Plan your trip to Heaven's Door Distillery, the Last Refuge, and Zephyr Gallery at **HeavensDoor.com**

Heaven's Door North Country Bramble

Yield: 1 cocktail

INGREDIENTS

5 blackberries (reserve one for garnish) 6 fresh basil leaves (reserve one for garnish) 1½ oz. Heaven's Door Straight Bourbon Whiskey ¾ oz. fresh lemon juice ½ oz. blackberry liqueur (such as Crème de Mûre)

PREPARATION

Combine blackberries and basil leaves in a cooktail shaker and gently muddle. Add remaining ingredients into a shaker with ice. Shake with vigor for 10 seconds. Strain into a rooks glass over fresh ice. Garnish with basil leaf and blackberry.

From left: The Last Refuge, Heaven's Door's new whiskey bar and music venue; a North Country Bramble.





Silas House

Silas House has written seven novels, including Lark Ascending, which won the 2023 Southern Book Prize. He became Kentucky's poet laureate earlier this year, cementing his status as a modern titan of Southern literature. For this issue, he profiled one of his own heroes, the heralded Virginia-raised author Lee Smith (p. 120), who has written fifteen novels and has served as a mentor to House for more than two decades. "I want people to read the article and feel like they have spent time with her," House says, "and come away knowing her differently than they might have by just reading her books."

"I want people to read the article and feel like they have spent time with Lee Smith"

-Silas House, who profiled the author, who's also his mentor (p. 120)



Amanda Heckert

WRITER

When Amanda Heckert stepped into Fat Harold's Beach Club in North Myrtle Beach last September to begin reporting "Save the Last Shag" (p.112), the South Carolinian was already acquainted with the state dance. "I first heard of shag in high school, and actually took some lessons at the Spartanburg YMCA," says Heckert, who before becoming Garden & Gun's executive editor worked at Atlanta magazine and Indianapolis Monthly. After almost a year of reporting and writing, she's inspired to start shagging again. "Sitting there in those clubs, when Chairmen of the Board comes on," she says, "you just want to get up and dance."



Oriana Koren

PHOTOGRAPHER

Earlier this year, the Florida-born photographer Oriana Koren moved from Los Angeles to Chicago, but not before photographing artist Calida Rawles at her California studio (p.34). "I was thrilled to have a goodbye project that really resonated with me," says Koren, whose photos have appeared in the California Sunday Magazine, Wired, and cookbooks for the likes of chef Bryant Terry, "Projects like this make me thankful that I have a camera in my hand and can use it as a way to connect with people." In September, Koren will release the monograph Advances in Freedom, "areimagination of the family album."



lars Leetaru

ILLUSTRATOR

For his illustrations, the Pennsylvania artist Lars Leetaru draws from a wide array of influences: Rembrandt, Joni Mitchell, The Simpsons. "Hove when I surprise myself with a sketch that I didn't see coming," he says. Take his illustration for "Southern Conundrum" (p. 42), for example, in which Leetaru, whose work has appeared in Rolling Stone and the Atlantio, used brush and ink on scratchboard to create a twofaced football fan with borrowed game-day tickets. "I wanted to show the possibility of good and bad behavior simultaneously," he says. "I like to depict opposites and leave each viewer to draw their own conclusion."



Lisa Donovan

WRITER

"Food writing, to me, is just writing," says Lisa Donovan, a James Beard Award-winning author and Nashville pastry chef who for this issue penned an ode to "trash salads," including a pistachiopudding creation (p. 54). "It's how I process the world and my own head." The author of the memoir Our Lady of Perpetual Hunger, Donovan has also written pieces for the New York Times, Saveur, and Food & Wine. Through her latest venture, Rêverie Retreats, she leads a series of workshops to help aspiring chefs hone their craft. "Writing helps me sort through life," she says, "but cooking and baking help me connect."



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"I just know there's a pair of ivorybills out there, somewhere"

SCENIC ROUTES

We got on U.S. Highway 17 in Winchester, Virginia, its northernmost point, and took it all the way home over six days ("The Art of Adventure," June/July 2023). A wonderful drive! This fall we hope to finish the route: St. Simons to Punta Gorda, Florida.

Miriam Lancaster St. Simons Island, Georgia

Many late nights when I lived in New Orleans and had trouble sleeping, I would ride the streetcar on St. Charles and go to Magnolia Grill. Then I'd get back on, ride to the end of the line, "flip the seats," and go back to the Quarter.

Jim Mambourg Morro Bay, California

KNOCK ON WOOD

One of my favorite reads back in 1988 was James Kilgo's Deep Enough for Ivorybills. In your story "Chasing the Swamp Ghost" (June/July 2023), you present a wonderful chronicle of Bobby and Norma Harrison's quest. I'm with you, Bobby: I just know there's a pair of ivorybills out there, somewhere.

Mount Holly, North Carolina

I giggled at the part in the story about people mistaking the pileated woodpecker for the ivory-billed woodpecker, as I may have once chased a bird through a chigger-filled field on Parris Island one August day to get a better look. Not an ivorybill, but it was still beautiful!

Jennifer Cox Alturas, California

STRAIGHT TO THE HEART

I cried when reading "Take Me to the River" in the June/July 2023 issue. I am a fly-fishing English teacher in South Florida with a cabin outside of Yellowstone. Yes, fly fishing is therapeutic. The people behind the On River Time program are amazing.

West Palm Beach, Florida

Lucinda Williams, your words saved me in my broken-down thirties, as J. D. Salinger's did when I was a hopeless freshman ("Lucinda Transcending," June/July 2023).

PJ Kirk Santa Cruz, California

Social

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WE ASKED ...

A Southern breakfast isnot complete without...

In our Talk of the South newsletter, readers filled in the blank with the dishes that make their mornings.

Virginia country ham and Stripling's smoked sausage. Phyllis W.

Homemade jelly from the crab apple tree in the front yard of my childhood home. Ann B.

Steen's cane syrup is good on everything. Kathryn M.

Redeye gravy. Rusty M.

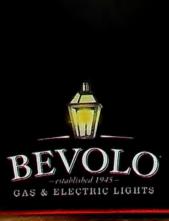
We named our Saturday morning breakfast group the "Royal and Ancient Society of Livermush Eaters." Jere B.

My grandmother made hot biscuits with blackstrap molasses for me until she died at 103. Susan R.

A Bloody Mary. Stuart T.

Bacon. And someone you love to share it with. Phyllis B.

Is this a trick question? Grits, of course. Rhonda F.



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Angling for a Delicious Vacation?

FINE DINING IN AND AROUND MYRTLE BEACH IS THE "REEL" DEAL

he most important thing to know about Myrtle Beach's restaurants is that we're not shipping in a bunch of fish," chef Adam Kirby says. The co-owner of South Carolina Grand Strand favorites Rustic Table and Bistro 217 would know. At his restaurants, he's often the one catching them. For Kirby, an Atlanta-born chef and experienced angler who be-

came a local legend when he reeled in a record-breaking black drumin 2017 off the Georgetown jetties, sea-to-table isn't a trendy idea. It's his way of life. Everything, he says, revolves around what's swimming.

"We have such a great variety of fish here," he says. "Right now, the mahi-mahi has just shown up offshore. If the wind's not blowing, you're going offshore to catch that along with wahoo and yellowfin. And if it's too windy, we're going up Waccamaw River for flounder. A couple of weeks from now, the flounder will slow down; then we'll be fishing for redfish and black drum." Kirby traces the seasons through the ebb and flow of the Atlantic, allowing it to dictate his menus and how he spends his free time.

"I get two days off a week. One of these days is for fishing. And the other is for my farm, Lake Swamp Farm, where I grow a lot of our produce for the restaurants," he says. His Johnsonville property bursts with the best of the state's favorites. Right now that's twenty-two acres of speckled butter beans, twelve acres of silver queen corn, three acres of okra, an acre of potatoes, and aton of watermelon. "Tonight we're going to do a gochujang roasted potato with some squash blossoms, peas, and beets and throw in some local arugula, melt that in there, and put a nice piece of fish on top."

It's an all-in regionally grown or collected approach but not exclusive to Kirby. He says the Grand Strand culinary community has become enthusiastically locally sourced.

"We have a lot of great chefs here," Kirby says, naming such restaurants as Soho, Claw House, SeaBlue, and Chive Blossom. They're places where establishing close relationships with the

area's best anglers and farmers shapes every element of fine dining. And Kirby says the culinary excellence continues to grow with evermore restaurants opening along the sixty-mile stretch of the Grand Strand.

"This is such a beautiful place to live, and we have everything," Kirbysays. "We have the entertainment in Myrtle Beach, and there are tons of fun things to do with the family, then there's golf with some of the best courses in the nation right here, and of course, the beach," he says. "Oh, and the best shrimp in the entire world. I've lived all over the country and never eaten better shrimp than right here."

There he goes crowing about seafood again. But Kirby can't help it. When it comes to Myrtle Beach's extraordinary foodways, he's a true believer.

Plan a destination dining adventure in Myrtle Beach at VisitMyrtleBeach.com

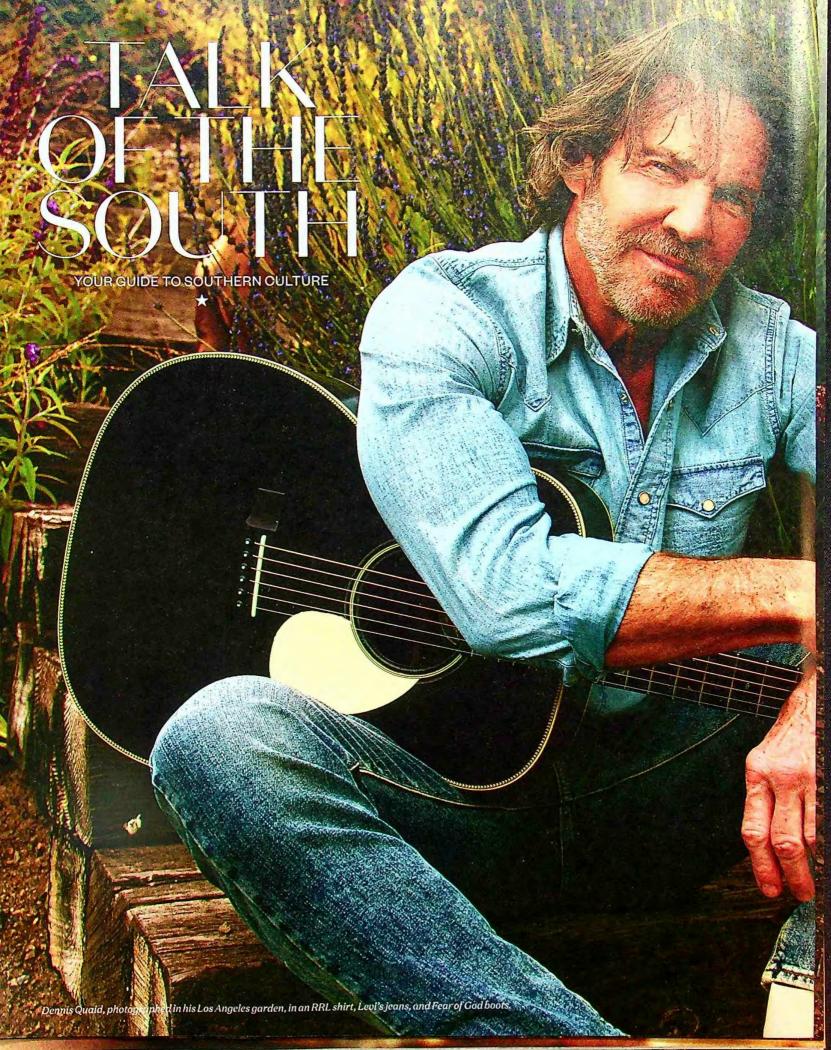
From top: A Lowcountry boil; a bird's eye view of the Grand Strand.



IT'S QUALITY TIME ALL THE TIME AT The Beach.

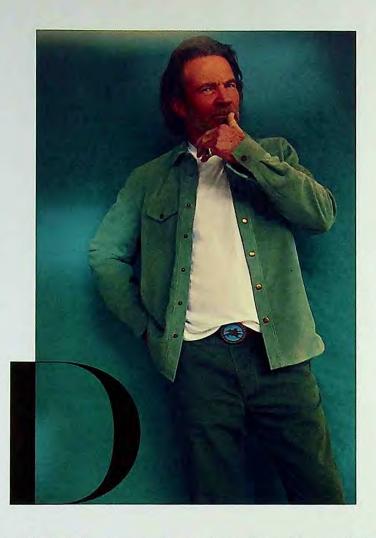


Make your summer getaway to The Beach. VisitMyrtleBeach.com



Dennis Quaid's Gospel Truth SILVER SCREEN, SMALL SCREEN, EVEN YOUR MUSIC STREAM-THE HOUSTON NATIVE HAS THEM COVERED By Monte Burke GARDENEGUN AUG V SEPT. 2023 29. PHOTOGRAPHS BY AUSTIN HARGRAVE

TALKOF THESOUTH



Dennis Quaid's nearly fifty-year career is marked by both its prolificacy and its high quality. The actor has performed in more than eighty films and ten-plus television shows, including memorable roles in The Rookie, The Right Stuff, The Big Easy, Traffic, The Day after Tomorrow, and The Parent Trap. And at sixty-nine, he's busier than ever: This year, he will appear in at least five productions, including the Steven Soderbergh-directed series Full Circle and the Yellowstone spin-off Lawmen: Bass Reeves, and next year, he'll play the lead in Reagan, a movie about the former president. His nascent production company, Bonniedale, released its first film in 2023 and has another five in the hopper. And lest you think he's a one-trick pony, Quaid recently put out a new album, Fallen: A Gospel Record for Sinners, with a mix of traditional and original songs. Here, the part-time Nashville resident speaks forthrightly about his career, his pooch, and what he loves about the South.

You're working harder now than ever. What keeps you going?

I just have a fire in my belly. I actually have more fun and more desire to do what I do now-and enjoy it so much more-than I did in my twenties and thirties. I'm no longer trying to get to some place or do it for money or awards. I've gone back to the very reason I started acting, when I was curious and intrigued by it all. I've come full circle, you could say.

What upcoming role particularly excites you?

Playing Ronald Reagan. It's the scariest role I've ever done. He was so well known

Quaid in a Billy Reid work shirt and RRL pants on his patio and, opposite, with Peaches, his English bulldog.

and there are so many preconceptions about him, so trying to capture him was daunting. He was really an enigma and didn't really show himself to anyone. The only people he really let in were his mother and Nancy.

You have a country-rock band, Dennis Quaid and the Sharks, and now you've released a gospel album. How did that come about?

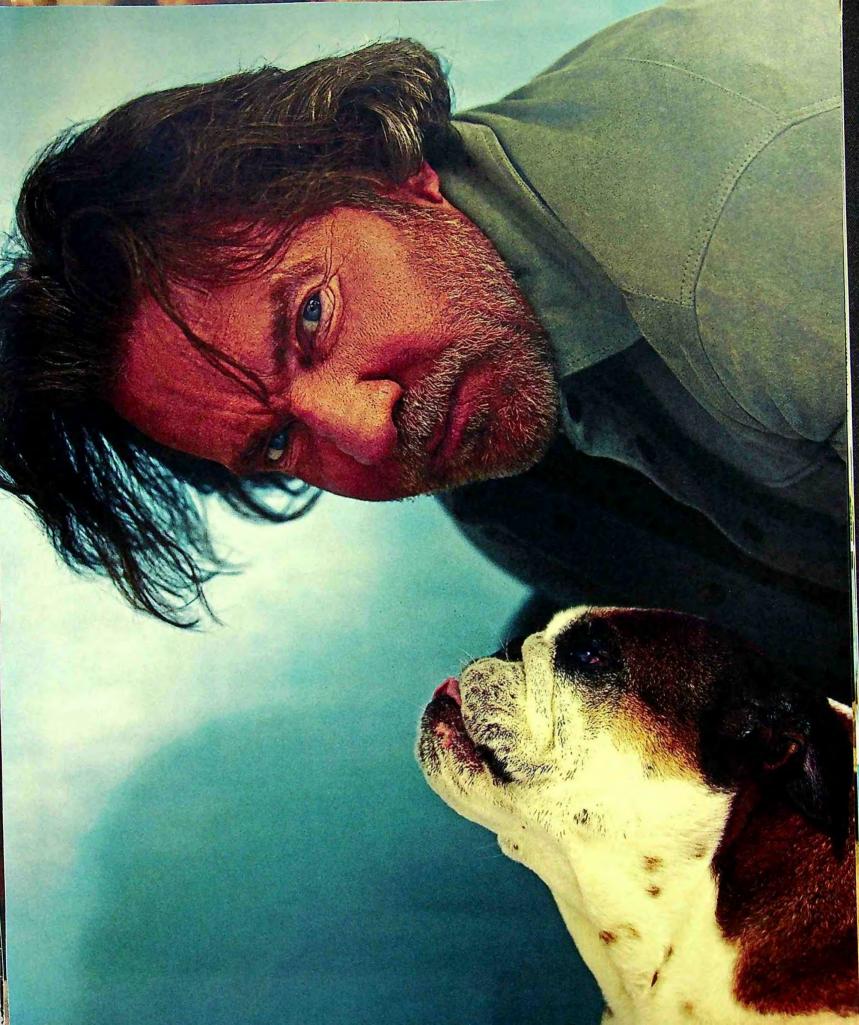
In college at the University of Houston, I was trying to figure out if it was music or acting for me. I went to a coffeehouse and did a singing audition for this lady as she sat behind the register smoking a cigarette. She told me, "What you've got is okay for living rooms, but you'll never make it." So acting it was, but I never quit music. I wrote songs for The Big Easy and other movies I've been in. I moved to Nashville a couple of years ago, and I had written some gospelsongs, and someone suggested I do a full record. I liked that idea and was encouraged by my wife.

You grew up in the Southern Baptist church and once described your path back to Christianity as "wayward." What did you mean by that?

In high school, I got disillusioned with what I call "Church-ianity." It was no longer spiritual. It just seemed like a lot of rules that people didn't really follow. I was always a seeker. I read the Koran and Eastern religion texts. In my twenties, I traveled around the world on one of those \$1,000 Pan Am tickets, and basically asked people in different countries, "Who is your God?" And then in the 1980s, I got addicted to cocaine. Getting off of that was a very spiritual journey, and that's when I found the Bible again. That's how the wayward boy came back.

What was that journey of overcoming addiction like?

When I was into cocaine, I wanted to stop, I wanted to just be normal, and I would promise myself that I would stop, but it





"I've always had dogs, but she's one of the great ones, really smart. I'm on the road a lot, and it's not fair to ask my family to go with me everywhere, so Peaches is good for that"

wouldn't happen. I would be trying to go to sleep, screaming at God, "Please let me go to sleep!" And I'd get maybe an hour of sleep and then go to work. It was no way to live.

I had a band at the time, and we had a gig at the China Club in Los Angeles. It was June 23, 1990. There were some record people there, and we actually got a deal that night. But we also broke up that night.

The guys were fed up with me. I was not in a good place.

Addiction has three stages: It's fun, then it's fun with problems, and then it's just problems. I went home that night and had one of those white-light experiences, and I saw myself in five years, dead or in jail or having lost everything I loved.

I checked into rehab the next morning and got out twenty-eight days later. That's

Peaches and Quaid, in a Derek Rose robe and Boot Star cowboy hat, lounge by the pool.

when the hard part began. I was basically grinding my teeth for a few years before the compulsion, that hole, left me. I filled it with my faith. Every individual will fill the hole with something different, but it has to be something real.

Iread that just as you were offered your first big role, in Breaking Away, you were also offered the role of Bo Duke in The Dukes of Hazzard and almost took that instead. Is that true?

It is. I had a choice. And I was broke. But Peter Yates [the director of *Breaking Away*] told me, "Listen, young man, *this* is the role you have to do." He became one of my great mentors.

Do you have a favorite role?

Playing Gordon Cooper in *The Right Stuff* was such a blast. I met the real Gordo, who was a childhood hero of mine and who became a great friend. Chuck Yeager was on the set every day, and I went flying with him. The shoot lasted nine months, and I didn't want it to end.

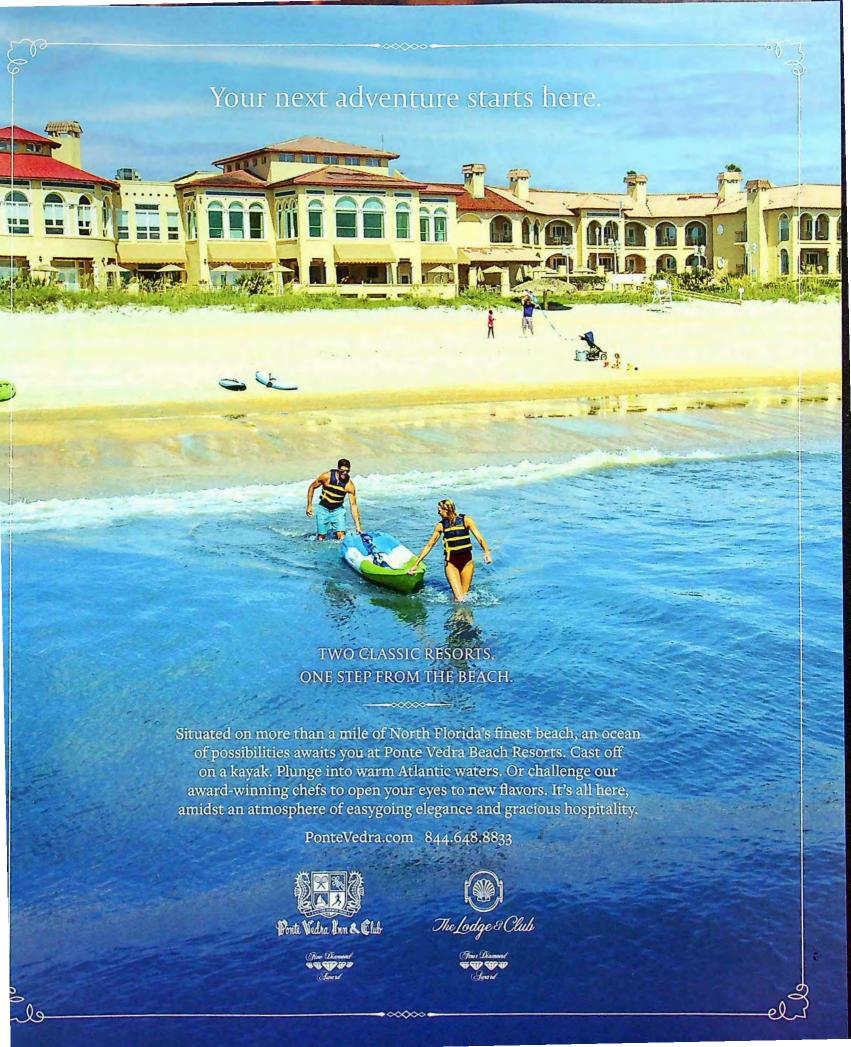
Peaches, your miniature English bulldog, goes everywhere—movie sets, airplanes, golf courses—with you, right? I've always had dogs, but she's one of the great ones, really smart and really tuned in. I'm on the road a lot, and it's not fair to ask my wife and family to go with me everywhere, so Peaches is good for that.

So many of your movies and shows have been based in the South. What resonates with you about the region?

I have always loved the tempo and how people really get to know their neighbors. I also like being around people who aren't in show business. The South has a way of keeping me grounded.

Any favorite Nashville haunts?

My favorite store? [Laughs.] That has to be Music City Golf. For restaurants, well, this city is no longer your grandfather's Nashville. Giovanni is probably my favorite. Gosh, I love that place.



TALKOF THE SOUTH





ARTS

Bodies of Water

PAINTER CALIDA RAWLES FINDS POWER IN THE POOL

By Kelundra Smith

alida Rawles's hyperrealistic paintings depict Black people submerged in water, swimming, or floating. For Rawles, giving one's body over to water represents the ultimate form of surrender—one she came to later in life.

Rawles grew up in Wilmington, Delaware, where she charged a nickel or a quarter to create drawings for classmates. In the summer, she would walk to her neighborhood pool, but only to play in the shallowend; neither she nor her parents knew how to swim. The historic echoes of the Middle Passage and racially segregated swimming pools still resonated for them, as they do for many African Americans—the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that even today Black people are one and a half times more likely to drown than white people.

That didn't change, even as Rawles enrolled at Spelman College, in Atlanta. Her experience on campus, however, not only schooled her more on Black history—and the practices of Black artists, such as Carrie Mae Weems and Elizabeth Catlett—but also challenged her. "I was around people who completed tasks and didn't take shortcuts," she recalls. "It felt like it was going to step my game up." Living in Atlanta also helped her find her voice. "I was not raised in a religious household," Rawles explains, "but in the South, hearing and talking about God and spirituality was regular, and it was in the culture." Now "I find that a lot in my work—I am reaching for a larger understanding of life and a connection to something larger than myself."

After graduating, Rawles earned her master's degree in painting from New York University and moved with her husband to Los Angeles, where she worked as a graphic designer and occasionally exhibited her paintings. Then, in 2013, Rawles had a breakthrough. A parent at her daughter's school encouraged her to swim for exercise. As Rawles began to learn, she found more than fitness in the pool. She discovered a peace.

"I wondered, how can I bring that to my practice?" Rawles says. So she began to take photos of submerged family, friends, and models, then interpreted the action with acrylics. The results not only looked ethereal but also allowed her, she says, "to address difficult issues" related to that historically fraught relationship with the water.

Enamored with her aesthetic, Rawles's friend, the writer Ta-Nehisi Coates, asked her to paint the cover art for his 2019 novel, *The Water Dancer*, which became a bestseller and brought her broader recognition, leading to a contract with New York's esteemed Lehmann Maupin gallery. In 2020, Various Small Fires gallery in Los Angeles hosted her first solo exhibition, *A Dream for My Lilith*. A piece for that show, *Guardian*, portrays a pregnant woman from the neck down, holding her belly while her white dress ripples in the water.

That same year, the former director of the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, visited Rawles's studio and offered a new context to her work. The college's colors are white and blue, she reminded Rawles; the school requires its student body to don all white on certain occasions, including Founders Day and graduation. "I didn't connect that I had to wear that dress when I was at Spelman," Rawles says.

That link came full circle when she painted a new piece for the *Black American Portraits* exhibition, which traveled from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to Spelman's museum earlier this year. The work, *Thy Name We Praise*, shows a woman in a flowy white dress, her arms outstretched in surrender. In turn, the museum added the work—titled after the first line of "The Spelman Hymn"—to its permanent collection.

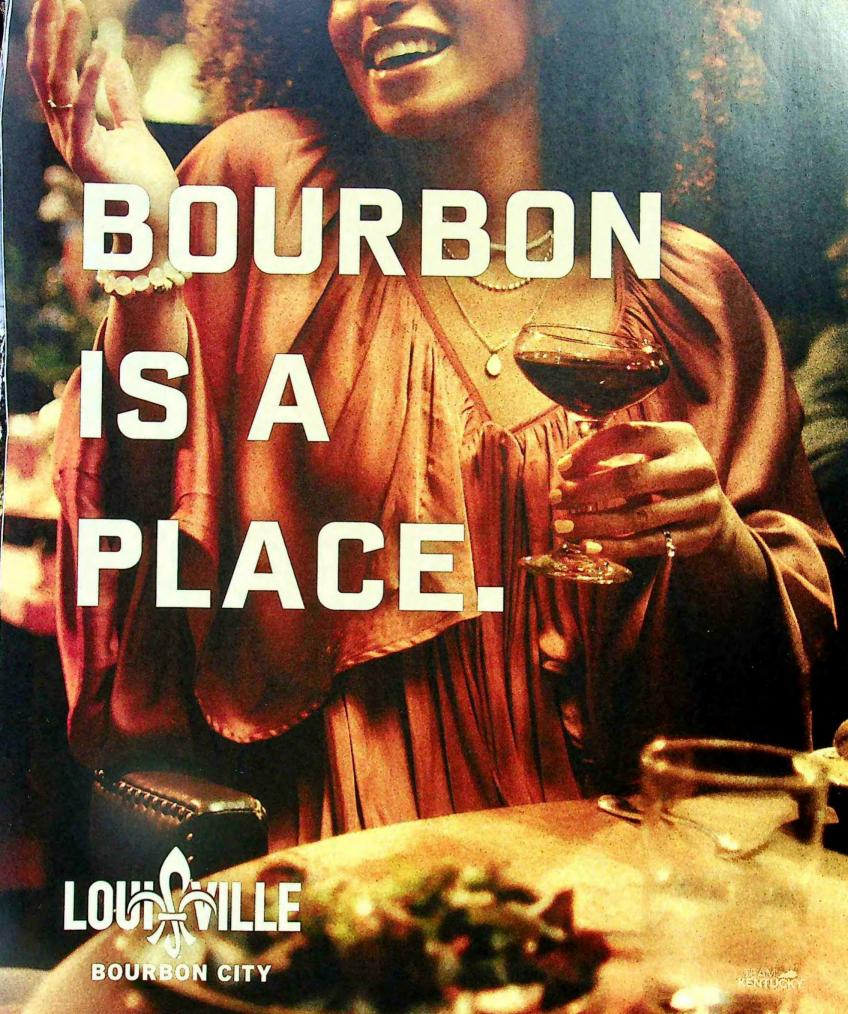
These days, Rawles describes the psychological and spiritual effect of being underwater without fear of drowning as calming. In her paintings, to swim is to be free—and able to save one's own life. "Water is ours," Rawles says, "like air."

From left: Calida Rawles in her Los Angeles studio; Thy Name We Praise, 2023.



Rawles began to take photos of family, friends, and models in water, then interpreted the action with acrylics. The results allowed her, she says, "to address difficult issues"







SPORTING SCENE

Custom **Spread**

REPLACING THE PLASTIC DECOYS WITH A FEW HARDWORKING HEIRLOOMS

By T. Edward Nickens

here's a little place I hunt, a pocket-sized beaver swamp with duckweed-spangled water and a canopy of flooded timber hung with mistletoe that is so fetching, so postcard perfect, that I blame its primeval charms for prompting an uncharacteristic decision on my part. Last year, standing in the swamp, I thought: I should hunt this place with hand-carved wooden decoys. This spot deserves something special.

It was an uncharacteristic thought in that handcarved wooden decoys have long seemed a luxury I didn't want to pay for, and a literal burden I didn't want to carry.

But there was something about the swamp woods that morning that turned all of that on its head, so I called my friend Tom Boozer, a decoy carver from Yonges Island, South Carolina. I ordered a rig of six working decoys: five wood ducks and a snazzy hooded merganser drake that I bet will help suck ducks in as a confidence decoy. Boozer has half a year to carve and paint my birds, and I have half a year to pay them off. It seems like a good arrangement.

I'm not alone in my thinking. According to Charlie Pierce, a decoy carver in Havre de Grace, Maryland, there's an increase in the number of hunters hauling hand-carved wooden decoys to the field. More people seem to be hunting in man-made impoundments, Pierce figures, which are perfect for wooden decoys, as fewer decoys are typically needed to draw in shallow-water-loving mallards, pintails, teal, and gadwall. "And even younger folks are buying wooden decoys," he says. "They're attracted to the history and heritage of a hand-carved decoy." Pierce's father, Jim, worked in the Chesapeake Bay shop of the famed decoy maker R. Madison Mitchell, and the two generations of Pierces now craft handmade decoys for both the display shelf and the duck blind, cut from the same patterns that turned out thousands of decoys in the mid-twentieth century.

The first step to start building your own gunning rig, Charlie Pierce suggests, is to have a conversation with a carver whose work you admire. I like the idea of hunting with decoys from as local a carver as you can find. Where you hunt, and how you hunt, can significantly affect the specifics of what you need. A decoy designed for impoundment hunting can weigh less and be carved with a somewhat narrower bottom. Decoys that will be used in running current, or larger bodies of water that can roil in chop, might need more surface area on the bottom "so they don't rock and roll so much," Pierce explains. And the placement of keel weights might differ depending on how long an anchor line is needed.

Carvers will also have ideas about the mix of drakes and hens in a spread. That can differ depending on the habitats you hunt and the time of year, as ducks tend to pair up later in the season, altering the ratio of females to males. For guides and avid hunters who will use the decoys heavily, Pierce will treat the birds with a UV spray to help prevent sunlight from weathering the paint prematurely. He even tints the primer coats so that scratches won't show through and bench a decoy until it can be repaired.

And you'll want to ask about efforts a carver takes to build hunt-worthy, tough decoys. The bill is a potential weak spot, so Boozer pays particular attention to the grain in his duck heads, and then soaks the unpainted bill with superglue to give it extra backbone. Pierce is a stickler for attaching heads to bodies, relying on both modern adhesives and a nail driven down from the top of the head into the body of the decoy.

Both Pierce and Boozer underscore the fact that you don't have to pony up for a pile of decoys all at once, or even a dozen. That's what tipped the scales for me. Boozer has customers who buy a duck a year to build a gunning rig over time. Pierce has clients who have built rigs of more than a hundred decoys two, four, or maybe six birds at a time. One solid approach to starting your own gunning rig is to make it easy on your spouseor parent or grandparent-and request a build-out of a gunning rig over multiple years of gift-giving days. Think of how grateful they will be that they won't have to devise a Christmas or birthday present for the next few years.

I'm already dreaming about how to deploy my upcoming Boozer gunning rig. Many decoy bags are made to fit magnum-sized plastic decoys, so my half dozen wooden woodies will easily fit into a six-slot bag, with plenty of room for a spinning-wing decoy and a small dry bag stuffed with shotgun shells and a peanutbutter-and-bacon breakfast sandwich.

As the sun comes up, I hope to watch wood ducks come skittering into decoys carved just for me, which I'll hand down to my son, in a tradition as old as the sport itself. In a sense, investing in wooden decoys is an expression of faith, and one that will set the stage for a different kind of harvest this year.



I like the idea of hunting with decoys from as local a carver as you can find. Where and how you hunt can significantly affect the specifics of what you need



Opposite: Carver Tom Boozer in a South Carolina swamp, surrounded by his wood duck decoys.



BOOKS

Reads to Savor

NEW BLUE-RIBBON SOUTHERN COOKBOOKS WORTH A SPOT IN THE KITCHEN

By Jonathan Miles



nyone who needs proof that biscuits are the South's quintessential foodstuff need only crack a book. You'll find them, "brownhued," in the work of Thomas Wolfe as well as tucked into a paper sack with a tin of sardines in that of Flannery O'Connor. The hot buttered biscuit that Jem shares with Scout, in Harper Lee's

To Kill a Mockingbird, tastes to the latter "like cotton." Their baking occurs in Toni Morrison's Beloved, as Sethe makes biscuits for Paul D, and supplies a hearth-warmed interlude in William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, when Dilsey prepares for kneading by grinding "a faint, steady snowing of flour onto the bread board."

These aren't the books to crack, however, if you want to learn the very particular secrets to making biscuits. For that, you preheat the oven and open Erika Council's Still We Rise: A Love Letter to the Southern Biscuit with Over 70 Sweet and Savory Recipes. Council is the chef-owner of Atlanta's Bomb Biscuit Co., which in seven years has grown from a pop-up to a pandemic delivery service to a food stall to its current incarnation as

a line-out-the-door restaurant in the city's Old Fourth Ward. Council's book is a tender valentine to biscuits and their history, but, as important, to the generations of Black cooks like her who baked, buttered, and perfected them. (Among them, her late grandmother Mildred Cotton Council, the famed proprietor of Mama Dip's Kitchen in North Carolina.)

Council bills herself as the biscuit "Jedi," and home bakers armed with this book will indeed be tapping into an ancient and powerful force. Her basic buttermilk biscuit is perfection. "Serve immediately," the recipe says, as if any fool could resist. But biscuits come in many permutations, and Council covers all the good ones-angel biscuits, with their little poof of yeast; 7UP biscuits, which get their high rise and slightly sweet flavor from a cold splash of the soda—and invents her own along the way: "butter swim biscuits," which, with almost indolent ease, "defy all the cardinal 'rules' that one MUST supposedly follow to master the perfect biscuit"; Duke's mayonnaise biscuits, which, I mean, come on; and her take on biscuit sandwiches, stuffed with fried oysters, or fried green tomatoes, or pimento cheese, or a lusciously deep-fried chicken thigh.

- Still We Rise, Clarkson Potter, \$26
- Southern Cooking, Global Flavors, Rizzoli, \$35

South of

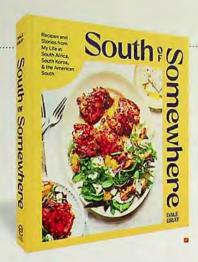
- Southern Lights, Gibbs Smith, \$30
- Egg Rolls & Sweet Tea, Gibbs Smith, \$32





Kenny Gilbert knows something about fried chicken and biscuits. After Oprah Winfrey tasted his version, she was hooked, getting it catered in whenever dinner guests appeared or hunger struck. The onetime Top Chef contestant now co-owns Silkie's Chicken & Champagne Bar in Jacksonville, Florida, and he's built his debut cookbook, Southern Cooking, Global Flavors, around a fetching scheme: He takes ten staples of Southern cuisine on a worldwide tour to show not only their universality but also how to reimagine them in your kitchen. Take those chicken biscuits, for example. In Korea, the honey sauce he lathers on the chicken gets a red smear of gochujang, with plantains and turmeric showing up in the biscuit dough. In China, the chicken comes topped with kung pao sauce and slaw, and peanuts and ginger perfume the biscuit. You catch the drift. Gilbert's other staples include ribs and slaw, seafood boils (his French take contains lobster and escargot), collards and cornbread, and oxtails and rice (which stop in the Philippines to become oxtail adobo and in Guyana to become a pepper pot with rice fritters).

Dale Gray's very existence has been something of a world tour. A native of South Africa, she worked for six vears in South Korea, where she met a soldier from New Orleans and followed him back to the States, eventuallylanding in Brookhaven, Mississippi. Her popular Instagram feed, dedicated to sharing "the food inspired by each South I've known," led to South of Somewhere: Recipes and Stories from My Life in South Africa, South Korea & the American South, a delightful debut cookbook. South Africa sneaks into her pimento cheese with Gouda and Peppadew peppers. Her ground beef bulgogi bowls, rowdy with ginger and sesame and shiitakes, are like a Korean cousin to our Southern dirty rice. Her ribs get lacquered in a maroon sauce of gochujang with maple syrup. And she's come to serve her South African rooibos tea "the way people



have iced tea in the American South: steeped, sweetened, and chilled in a pitcher to sip on at a moment's notice, usually on the front porch with friends."

What Gray cooks might technically be classified as fusion cuisine, but what a distinctly personal fusion it is. Same goes for Natalie Keng, whose Egg Rolls & Sweet Tea: Asian Inspired, Southern Style melds the heritage of her Taiwanese parents, who immigrated to Georgia in the 1960s, with the Southern fare they came to adore. Keng's fried chicken goes into spring rolls, rather than biscuits, which she swirls into honey. She boils what her mother called "dirt beans"-the Mandarin translation for peanuts-with cinnamon sticks, star anise, muscovado sugar, and a glug of soy sauce. Okra isn't for breading and frying but for delicately blanching and dipping into a daikon radish sauce. Exemplifying that "Buddha-Bubba" nexus, her fried catfish gets drizzled with a hot Hunan chile sambal spiked with muscadine cider.

"Much of the Southern diet actually resembles that of the Mediterranean, considered the healthiest diet in the world," writes food blogger turned cookbook author Lauren McDuffie. Hmmm, maybe. But McDuffie's mission to "(politely) refute the claim that Southern food is all bad for you and hopefully breathenew life into sometired, worn-out notions" is a noble and, as it turns out, delicious one. In Southern Lights: Easier, Lighter, and Better-for-You Recipes from the South, McDuffie swaps Greek yogurt for mayo and figs in a blanket for the pigs without ever losing sight of the pleasures of eating Southwise. She lightens up the cooking without dimming the flavors. Her smoky pinto beans with vinegary tomatoes, showered with pink shards of skilletcrisped country ham, is healthy without tasting like anyone's idea of healthy. Her pecan pie bites-little roly-poly balls of toasted pecans, dates, vanilla, and bourbon, if you please-supply the yum of pecan pie without the subsequent nap-time sugar crash.

The book's final recipe, however, makes a sharp break with the theme. There's no olive oil or avocados or yogurt in sight. No, this one calls for two sticks of butter and a cup of full-fat buttermilk. "Many recipes lighten up beautifully, with no cost to their deliciousness," McDuffie writes. "But a biscuit? Not so much."

Somethings, after all, are sacred.



CONSERVATION

Bully for Bison

A RESTORED OKLAHOMA TALLGRASS PRAIRIE OFFERS A BLUEPRINT FOR HERITAGE HERDS

By Lindsey Liles

ome August in the Osage Hills of Oklahoma, Maximilian sunflowers bloom yellow. Cleansing prescribed fires crackle across grasslands filled with big and little bluestem, Indian grass, and switchgrass. Greater prairie chickens chuckle from the ground; coyotes on the hunt howl. And the rumbles of wild American bison echo day and night, as a herd more than two thousand strong engages in the rituals that will perpetuate their kind—all of it a scene that came perilously close to flickering out.

The historical range of the American bison (sometimes called buffalo), the largest land animal in the Western Hemisphere, once touched every present-day Southern state, and herds traversed the prairies left by retreating glaciers in unthinkable abundance—an estimated sixty million—following new growth that flourished after fires started by lightning strikes or Native Americans. Ten thousand years later, Europeans arrived and slaughtered that bounty, destroying a way of life for the tribes that had evolved alongside, relied upon, and deeply revered the animals. By the late 1800s, fewer than a thousand bison remained.

Thanks to a last-ditch effort by early conservationists and Native tribes, bison narrowly survived the bottleneck, and today, after a decades-long push, one of the largest herds in the country roams the Nature Conservancy's Joseph H. Williams Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, covering 39,650 acres in Northeast Oklahoma. "To get an ecosystem functioning as it used to, you have to put it back under the forces of nature that created it in the first place," says Bob Hamilton, the preserve's current director. That began in 1993, when Hamilton and Harvey Payne, the first director, spearheaded burn regimens and introduced three hundred bison donated by a private ranching family.

Thirty years of research then ensued to figure out how fire and bison shape the ecosystem, and how to burn and manage ranchland in ways that help cattle keep the prairie diverse when bison aren't present.

The preserve now burns a third of the bison's space throughout the year, and once fresh vegetation sprouts, the bovines flock to eat up the nutrient-rich shoots, leaving other patches to thrive. A tallgrass prairie with bison is a shifting mosaic of those patches, each of which harbors its own suite of species. Henslow's sparrows nest on the ground in overgrown thickets; upland sandpipers prefer newer growth. "This crazy quilt, historically with patches from the size of your living room up to the size of Kansas, supported the plants and wildlife of the Great Plains," Hamilton explains.

Bison behavior diversifies the landscape even further. When a two-thousand-pound animal takes a dust bath, the wallow forms a miniature pond that can fill with rainwater, creating a wetland where moisture-loving plants pop up and frogs come to breed. A bison dung pad supports more than a hundred insect species. Chunks of spring-shed bison hair provide prime nesting material for birds and mice. The preserve showcases 750 plant, 250 bird, and eighty mammal species reaping those bison benefits.

The revival is starting to play out elsewhere, too. Last year, the InterTribal Buffalo Council marked thirty years of distributing bison to tribal lands; in 2022, the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve donated two hundred of its herd to the council and will do so again this year. Osage Nation, located in the same county as the preserve, started a herd in 2016, and in turn, the council allocated it fifty-four more bison last year, boosting its number to two hundred. "Traditionally, Osage people undertook a fall and a spring hunt for bison, and we used them for everything," says Jann Hayman, the Nation's secretary of natural resources. "It's so moving to see them on our landscape again and know that we're reengaging with this piece of our cultural heritage that was lost."

This past spring, the federal government pledged more than \$25 million to further aid bison restoration. About eighty tribes in twenty states are currently cultivating their own herds on a million acres of tribal land. And the Nature Conservancy plans to continue to knit together a large portion of the remaining grasslands in the Osage Hills of Oklahoma and the Flint Hills of Kansas, protecting some of the world's last swaths of tallgrass prairie—and exporting the methodology of the preserve that started it all.

Harvey Payne recalls growing up on an Oklahoma ranch and riding horseback into the hills to survey the grasslands below. "I'd look at the old wallows and let my mind wander, wondering what this country could have looked like back when bison covered the landscape," he says. "Now seeing that here at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve is like rolling back the clock and recapturing something that we came so close to losing forever." \square

A bellowing bison at Oklahoma's Joseph H. Williams Tallgrass Prairie Preserve,





SOUTHERN CONUNDRUM

Is It Okay to Give Our Season Tickets to Opposing Fans for a Game?

BY ACE ATKINS

hew! This is a delicate dilemma and depends on two things: 1. How well do you know these people? And 2. How well do they know Emily Post? Because despite how we may feel about our rivals, good manners are sports agnostic.

Handing off precious season tickets-even if your football team is playing a ringer smaller than most high schools-is a huge act of trust (partic-

ularly here in my adopted home of Oxford, Mississippi). You won't be present, but the season ticket holders in the rows around you absolutely will, and unless you want icy glares from your seatmates for years to come, ask yourself these questions about your guests:

- 1. Do they have any tattoos of Bear Bryant?
- 2. Do they say that their two best friends are Jack and Jim?
- 3. Where do they stand on body paint?
- 4. Do you know where they were on January 6?
- 5. Are they from Baton Rouge?

Also, remind the guests that no matter how loudly they yell, the players and coaches can't hear them, but the seven-year-old two seats away definitely can. And no matter what they repeat from ESPN talking heads, yelling-not cheering-only annoys those around you. Guests should be cordial, sit unless it's a huge play, and for the love of God, not start arguments.

As a former Auburn defensive end who was once pelted by obscenities and hot dogs at the Swamp, I can assure you that bad behavior is far too common. And no, it's not a recent problem.

Several years ago, I accepted the hospitality of my late, dear friend Dean Faulkner Wells-niece of a fairly famous writer-every time Auburn played at Ole Miss. Dean not only gave up her seat for me to see my old team but also drove me and her husband, Larry, to and from the stadium. I made damn sure I was on my best behavior out of respect to her and her nearby Ole Miss faithful. Even though I wore my navy blue and my Auburn hat, I didn't make a nuisance of myself every time the Tigers made a big play (or failed to). I didn't scream War Eagle at the top of my lungs or taunt the section after a big sack. I quess the past isn't dead, it's whippin' y'all's ass!

While I don't have season tickets at Auburn or here at Ole Miss, I'm fortunate to have a standing invite to my friend Marquis's Grove tent. A few years ago, I learned that my pal John Sewell-a former athletic trainer at Auburn-and his wife would be in Oxford for the game. While we weren't in the stadium, being a guest in the Grove is of equal or perhaps higher social importance. The Sewells, while massive Auburn fans deep in Rebel territory, were gracious and wonderful guests, showing up with a bottle of Knob Creek and plenty of good vibes for the upcoming game. They left Oxford with many new friends. No one cared what colors they wore.

And that's what you should impart to those accepting your generous offer of tickets. They're not there to make a spectacle for their tribe but as guests in your house. Good behavior is the bare minimum. Even at just a football game. @





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ne evening in May, Rhiannon Giddens was taking a walk near her home in southern Ireland. The stroll had become a nightly ritual, a way to clear her head after helping her two children get ready for bed. This night was special. A tweet popped up on her phone, announcing that she and her co-composer, Michael

Abels, had won the Pulitzer Prize in Music for *Omar*, an opera that tells the story of a Muslim man who was enslaved and taken from his home in West Africa, then sold in Charleston, South Carolina.

The opera premiered at Charleston's Spoleto Festival USA last year to a rapturous reception. But Giddens says she had forgotten *Omar* had been submitted to the Pulitzer committee until that moment. By the time she got home, her phone was exploding with messages.

The Pulitzer is yet another feather in the cap of one of the most decorated and singular artists of the last twenty years. After graduating from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music with a degree in vocal performance, Giddens returned to her native Greensboro, North Carolina, and worked various jobs, including a short stint as a singing hostess at a Macaroni Grill. Turning from a focus on opera, she became increasingly interested in American roots and folk music, particularly its overlooked origins. She took up the banjo and has since worked tirelessly to reclaim the instrument as one born in Black culture. She has played in numerous musical groups, including as a founding member of the Carolina Chocolate Drops; has given countless lectures; and received a MacArthur "genius" grant in 2017. She just completed a ten-part video series on the history of the banjo, and currently hosts My Music with Rhiannon Giddens on PBS. "Part of the problem is that I say yes to too many things," she says. "I can't take my foot off the gas, because I want to make sure that the story gets told."

But on her new solo album, You're the One-her first

since 2017's Freedom Highway-Giddens shifts gears, and the results are an absolute delight. While the banjo is still present, it's fleshed out with funk, zydeco, blues, and bold horns. Throughout, she channels several of her female singing heroes. "Too Little, Too Late, Too Bad" kicks off the album with a burst of Aretha Franklin R&B. There's some sassy Dolly Parton in "If You Don't Know How Sweet It Is"; the hushed dramatics of Patti Page in the torch song "Who Are You Dreaming Of"; and Bonnie Raitt's acoustic country blues on "Yet to Be," a duet with Jason Isbell that tells the story of a Black woman in a relationship with an Irishman (Giddens's ex-husband and the father of their children, Michael Laffan, is an Irish musician). "Yet to Be' is a throwback to nineties country that I listened to so much when I was younger," she says. "And I love that because that's a part of who I am. I listened to music made by strong women."

Giddens wrote the album's songs over the past several years and tapped the producer Jack Splash, known for his work with Alicia Keys, St. Paul & the Broken Bones, and Tank and the Bangas. At Miami's legendary Criteria Recording Studios, she and her longtime collaborators holed up with Splash's crew of horn players and percussionists, and the chemistry is palpable from the jump. "These two distinct groups melded completely," Giddens says. "Everybody was like, 'Oh, this is gonna be fun."

Giddens will tour for You're the One this fall and then dive into other projects, including one centered around the impact of the transcontinental railroad. So what does she do to relax? "Crocheting," she says. "In fact, I'm finishing up a blanket right now." It's perhaps not a surprising hobby for an artist who is always striving for her work to serve a larger purpose, her "mission," as she calls it, which she says she will never give up. "Butthe point of this record is, if I can't explore the different aspects of myself as an artist, then I won't be as good at doing the mission."

Carolina Gold

Spirited sounds from M. C. Taylor and company



Hiss Golden Messenger JUMP FOR JOY

After spending most of 2022 on the road, reveling in the return to touring, North Carolina's Hiss Golden Messenger continues the euphoria on the aptly titled Jump for Joy. It's the grooviest-and most personal-albumyet from bandleader and songwriter M.C. Taylor, who provides eloquent snapshots of his musical journey through an autobiographical character, Michael Crow. Songs like the buoyant "California King" marry New Orleans funk with the good vibes of the Grateful Dead, while Crow, and the album. reaches a blissful finish on "Sunset on the Faders," a glorious countryrockstomp.-MH

Rhiannon Giddens will tour this autumn for You're the One.



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ANATOMY OF A CLASSIC

Banana Nana

CHEF ROB McDANIEL
CHANNELS WARM
BANANA PUDDING
MEMORIES
By Kim Severson

y - - - Charlotte Autror additional food styling by Sydney Taylor



Among the many fierce and tangled debates about Southern food, banana pudding offers a clear line of demarcation: Either you like it cold, or you like it warm. Chef Rob McDaniel, who owns Helen in Birmingham with his wife, Emily, is a warm pudding guy. He grew up in Haley ville, a town of about 4,300 people in northern Alabama. Both his grandmothers made warm banana pudding. They'd layer cookies and warm custard with banana slices in a Pyrex dish, then top it with egg whites and sugar whipped into a simple meringue.

"If I had cold banana pudding, it was because it had been sitting on the counter and it was later after lunch," he says. "When I eat cold pudding, I think of one of those pudding cups."

When McDaniel was considering adding warm banana pudding to the menu at Helen, which he named after one of those grandmothers, he asked the staff for a show of hands. "How many people grew up eating warm banana pudding?" Only half the room raised a hand. "It was kind of mind-boggling," he says. "I knew

cold banana pudding existed, but I didn't realize how many people were purists about it."

McDaniel, who has a hospitality degree from Auburn and studied at the New England Culinary Institute, set out to change some of those minds by making a homey but sophisticated version of the pudding he was raised on. It starts with pecan sandies, which stand in for the traditional vanilla wafer cookies. He bakes his own, and if you have a favorite recipe for pecan sandies and the time to make a batch, it's a wonderful touch. Otherwise, he says, store-bought is fine.

As for the warm custard, keep an eye on it as it cooks, he advises, so it doesn't get too thick. The crowning touch is an Italian meringue, which requires beating hot sugar syrup into egg whites. It's a little trickier than what his grand mothers used to top their pudding, but much silkier and substantial enough so swirled peaks of it brown nicely. He uses a kitchen torch, but a brief trip under a broiler works, too. (His recipe will leave you with some extra meringue, which he suggests baking into small meringue cookies to serve on the side. It can also sub in for frosting on cupcakes.)

At the restaurant, McDaniel layers cookie pieces, banana slices, and custard into jelly-style mason jars. You can top the jars with the meringue and serve right away, or keep them in a warm-water bath until dinner is over. It's a bit fancier than his grandmother's Pyrex pudding, but the effect, he says, is the same. "It's like this warm hug," he says. "You don't get that from cold banana pudding."



MEET THE CHEF: ROB McDANIEL

Hometown: Haleyville, Alabama

Favorite thing to eat:
Alabama
heirloom tomatoes
and "anything
that anybody
else cooks."

Tip for home cooks:
"Don't let cooking intimidate you."
If there is something you want to make, just give it a shot.
"You'll get better with practice."

Most beloved tool in the kitchen: "My grandmother's skillets."

Warm Banana Pudding

Yield: 4 (8 oz.) servings



INGREDIENTS

For the meringue: (About 4 cups) 1½ cups granulated sugar ¾ cup water 6 egg whites Pinch of cream of tartar

For the custard:
(About 4 cups)
3 egg yolks
3 cups whole milk
1 tsp. vanilla
extract
4 cup flour
11/2 cups sugar
4 tsp. salt

To assemble: 8 to 10 pecan sandies, broken into quarters 2 bananas, sliced into rounds

PREPARATION:

Makethe meringue: Combine sugar and waterina heavybottomed pot, then place over medium heat. Stirring frequently, allow sugar to dissolve and reach a temperature of 245°F on a candy thermometer (also called the soft ball stage). While the sugar-water heats, place egg whites and cream of tartar in the bowl of a stand mixer. Using the whisk attachment, whisk

the egg whites just until frothy.

With the mixer on medium speed, slowly drizzle the hot sugar syrup into the egg whites. Once all the sugar mixture has been incorporated, whip on high until thick and glossy. Set aside until it's time to assemble the dessert.

Make the custard:
In a large bowl, mix the wet ingredients together with a whisk. In a separate bowl, combine all the dry ingredients and mix well. Whisk dry ingredients into wet ingredients, making sure to whisk out any lumps. Pour the

a heavy-bottomed pot and begin to cook over medium heat. Stir constantly; the mixture burns very easily. The custard will thicken in about 5 to 8 minutes. Don't cook it until it is too thick. If your custard has lumps and if you care about it, you can pass it through a mesh sieve.

custard mixture into

To assemble: Set out 4 jelly-style mason jars that hold 8 oz. each. Begin by adding a layer of cookie pieces to each jar, about 4 banana slices, and ¼ cup of custard. Repeat the process and fill the jars to the top. (These can be held in a bath of warm water in a pan on the stove until ready to serve.)

Scoop about 1/2 cup of meringue onto the top of each filled jar. Using a spoon or spatula, pull up strands of meringue to create a rough, interesting texture. Set desserts on a pan and slip the pan about 4 inches under a hot broiler for a few seconds until the meringue starts to brown, or brown the meringue using a small torch.





On a trip to California in the nineties, chef John Fleer plucked and ate an olive right off the tree. "Bad idea!" says Fleer, the executive chef and owner of Rhubarb in Asheville. "It was astringent, bitter, and overly firm. I couldn't believe anyone had ever been able to figure out how to make olives delicious." That moment came back to him several years ago when his go-to farmerat Gaining Ground Farm, just outside of Asheville, was picking the last remaining red cherry tomatoes at the end of summer before ripping out the sun-spent plants to make room for fall crops. "It struck me that there would be a lot of unripe to matoes still on those plants," Fleer says. Rather than let them go to waste, he decided to give them the olive treatment by brining them. "While green tomatoes aren't quite as disgusting, they have similar characteris-

green tomato olives are now a regular on charcuterie boards and in cocktails at Rhubarb. While simple, the process requires some patience-you soak the tomatoes in water for a week to pull out the bitterness, then bathe them in brine with spices for a week more. Acidic and bright, the resulting olives will keep for several weeks in the fridge and are worth the wait. "They can also be used in salads and pastas as a flavorful and briny garnish," Fleer says. "They're really just as versatile

as regular olives." Not to mention a beautiful way to enjoy a last bite of summer. G

tics." He loved the result so much that

THE CHEF RECOMMENDS:

Green **Tomato** Olives Yield: 4 cups

INGREDIENTS

4 cups green (unripe) cherry tomatoes, washed 4 cups water for boiling (plus more for soaking) 1/4 cup kosher salt 11/2 tsp. fenugreek seeds 11/2 tsp. celery seeds 2 lemons, diced 11 oz. champagne

vinegar 6 oz. olive oil 4 cloves garlic, halved 4 sprigs oregano

PREPARATION With a sharp knife, score a small X shape on each green cherry tomato at the nonstemend. In a large container with a lid,

cover the tomatoes in water and place in the refrigerator. Change the water daily for 7 days. For the brine, in a pot bring water and salt to a simmer. Stir until salt has dissolved then remove from heat. In a small dry pan, toast fenugreek and celery seeds until fragrant,

just a few minutes. Stir the toasted seeds into the brine, then allow the mixture to cool to room temperature. Drain the tomatoes, then add to the brine. Transfer brine and tomatoes to a large mason jar with lemons, champagne vinegar, olive oil, garlic cloves, and oregano. Cover

with cheesecloth and leave on the counter overnight, Replace cheesecloth with a lid and let sit in the refrigerator for another week before enjoying. Will keep in the fridge for several weeks.





DRINKS

AI on the Rocks

A CHATBOT MIXES A SOUTHERN COCKTAIL—WITH SURPRISING RESULTS

By Wayne Curtis

computer in a spy thriller: "What a lovely setting!" my imaginary friend wrote. "Here's a recipe for a cocktail that's both refreshing and warming, perfect for sipping on a veranda in South Carolina as the air starts to cool."

I had specified North Carolina, but whatever. Perhaps it was a Northern computer, which could explain its struggle to differentiate between the two Carolinas. But I made the drink it proposed, and, lo, it was quite good. As far as I know, the machine didn't simply cadge another recipe from an obscure website, though there exist more drink recipes on the internet than stars in the night sky, so I can't be sure. But AI adroitly crafted something with merit—essentially, it started with the Gold Rush, a honey-tinged variation on the whiskey sour popular in the early 2000s, and then added bitters and lengthened it with club soda to invigorate.

And the name of the drink? ChatGPT had the answer for that as well: "In honor of Truman Capote, let's call it the 'Capote Cooler."

Well, let's. (Let us also agree to ignore the fact that Capote's favorite cocktail was the screwdriver.) And since I was in New Orleans and not in the Carolinas, I set about creating a setting for this beverage. I punched the same scenario into Microsoft Bing's Image Creator. It produced several pictures of middle-aged men in sweaters on a porch with a drink in hand. This did not inspire. So I broadened my request, and asked it to depict "a classic Southern cocktail served on a veranda in the Carolinas, at a home in the manner of Thomas Kinkade." Four images popped up. Spanish moss figured in one, gauzy hills in the others, with one offering a cunning little cottage across a well-tended yard.

I settled into this virtual world with my actual drink and found it quite comfortable. I, for one, welcome our new home bartender overlords.

am sitting on a veranda in the North Carolina highlands. It's not yet fall, but there's a cool tang to the air. I am about to go inside for a sweater, and I plan to return with a cocktail, something both refreshing and warming. A drink, say, Truman Capote might enjoy. What should that be?

Actually, I am not on a mountain veranda. I'm in my office in New Orleans, and it's early summer and humid. But the prompt above is what I fed into the artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT, which uses what's called a "large language model" to devise responses and mimic human interactions. Until last year, as far as I was concerned, "large language model" chiefly referred to William Faulkner's prose. Now it's the next thing in technology. If you want to know more, just eavesdrop wherever young people are gathered.

Within seconds, the chatbot responded with text appearing on the screen, word by word, in the manner of a

Capote Cooler

Yield: I cocktail

1NGREDIENTS 2 oz. bourbon

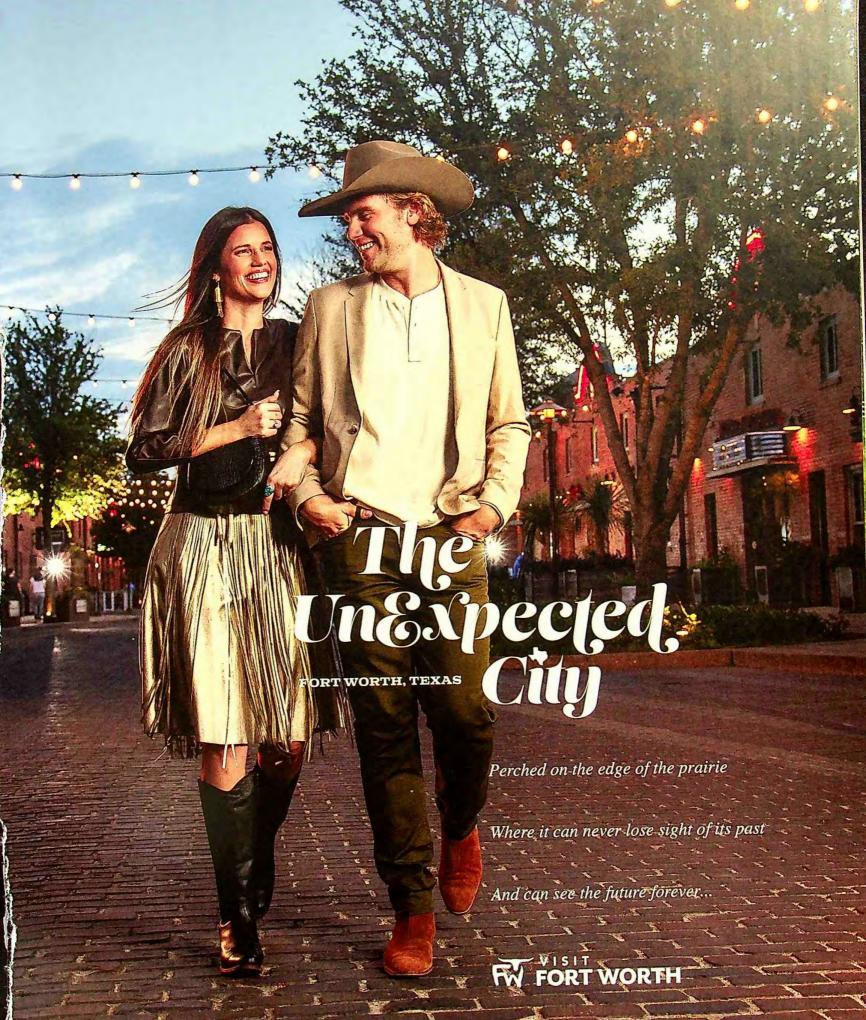
I oz. freshly squeezed lemon juice ½ oz. honey syrup (1-to-l honey to water; heat gently until dissolved) ½ oz. ginger syrup (1-to-l ginger juice to sugar)

2 dashes Angostura bitters Club soda Lemon twist, for garnish

PREPARATION

Put the first 5 ingredients in a cocktail shaker filled with ice, and shake until well chilled. Strain into a

oollins glass filled with ice. Top off with club soda and stir. Garnish with a lemon twist.





TRADITIONS

Trash to Treasure

A LOVE CONGEALS OVER A LONG-DESPISED PISTACHIO-PUDDING SALAD

By Lisa Donovan



atergate Salad, Shut the Gate Salad, Green Stuff, Pink Stuff, Orange Stuff, Mean Green, Golden Gate Salad, Goop, Fluff, Pistachio Delight.

These were the words that set the hook when I started researching what I have come to call, affectionately (but perhaps a bit cruelly), the

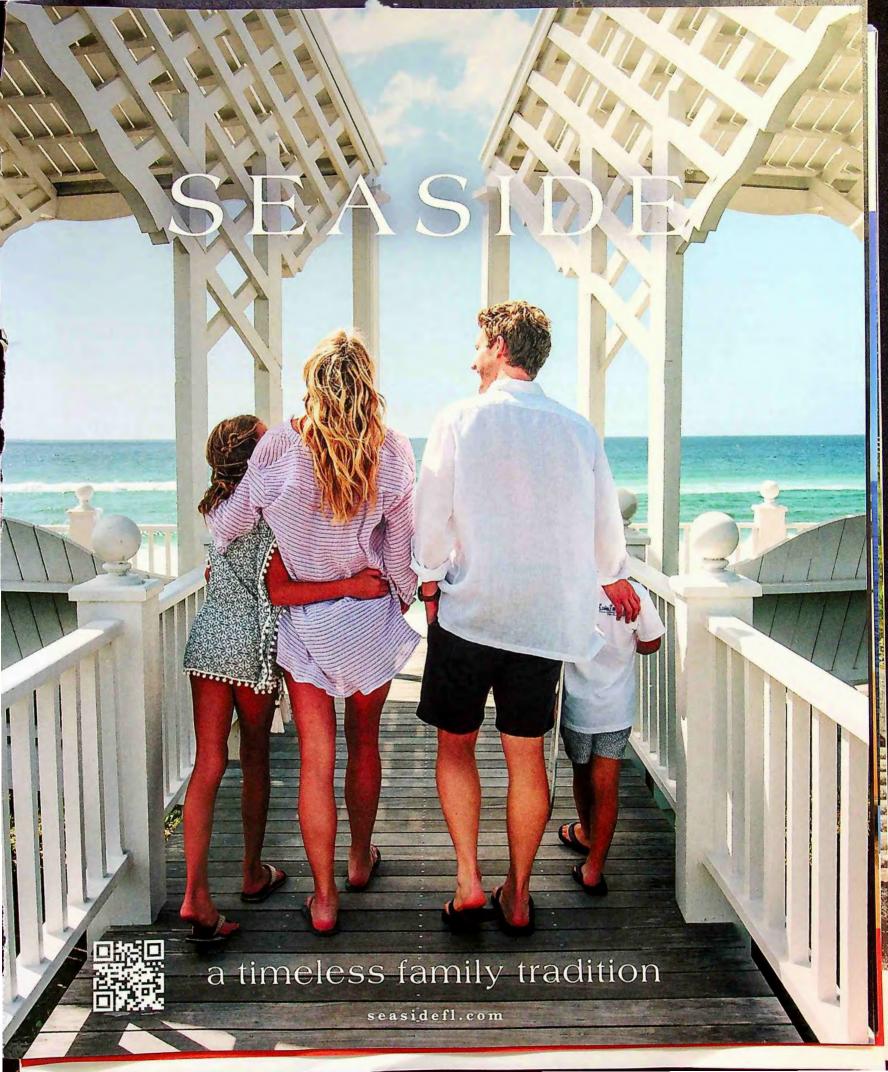
Great American Trash Salad.

As a child, I refused this congealed thing, this mysterious orb-studded concoction in various colors of shame and regret. It confused me. I didn't appreciate that it was being sold as a "salad" when it was clearly a dessert. And like any decent, card-carrying child with opinions, I was not fond of mixing my food. This liar of a salad was basically my worst nightmare.

Thankfully, the Great American Trash Salad made only a few appearances as I grew up. When it did grace

the table, I was quick to disavow its presence, my eyes glossing over and straight past it to the deviled eggs and my mom's macaroni salad—both so perfectly and consistently executed that, frankly, I needed little else at these family gatherings. Then one day, when I showed up to my parents' house for Thanksgiving in the "Is It Over Yet?" year of 2022, there on the kitchen counter stood a stack of powdered pudding and gelatin boxes teetering like Jenga blocks.

Maybe it was pandemic-induced boredom. Maybe there was a sale on pistachio Jell-O pudding. Maybe my dad requested it. But for some reason, at this moment in time when we were still unsure if we would ever be able to move forward without the continual sting and burden of the global and personal garbage that the past few years had wrought, my mother decided to send me to the store for Cool Whip, mini marshmallows, canned pineapple, and the nut of my choice.



I didn't ask what we were making. I knew. My eyebrow arched toward my mother as she handed me the list written in her perfect cursive and smiled.

It was Trash Salad time. And at least one of us was excited.

I steadied myself, made my way into the DeFuniak Springs, Florida, Winn-Dixie, and then ditched the list on the passenger seat.

In a store like this, everyone knows exactly what you're about to go home to do when a frozen tub of Cool Whip, a can of crushed pineapple, a bag of pecans, and a bag of marshmallows are bobbling in your arms. For the first time in my life, I clocked envy, even delight, in the eyes of my fellow shoppers. Old men looked over my groceries with active eyebrows. Little kids pointed and wandered toward me like stray cats that know exactly where the best feeding spots lie. The woman running the cash register said, "Yes, ma'am-enjoy that salad!" to which I thought, pff SALAD! but said, "Oh yes ma'am, you know I will!" even though time had proved to me that I most certainly would not.

Like a good daughter, I headed back to my parents' farm in Mossy Head resigned to help with this godforsaken mess of a dish. My subversive ass did get no-sugaradded crushed pineapple, though.

I had never made it before, but the salad seemed pretty simple. Mom provided guidance: Drain the pineapple, mix everything together in a bowl, chill. I deputized myself and my fancy pastry chef training with the authority to add: Toast pecans.

Preparing the dish only took as long as the Cool Whip needed to defrost and the nuts needed to toast. But Mom and I took our time just the same, popping mini marshmallows into our mouths and talking about this damn salad, a chat sprinkled with nearly indecipherable nods toward how nice it was to be Here instead of There (you know, the stretch where we couldn't make any salad together, much less one that felt criminal in its ingredients).

She wasn't even sure if she liked Trash Salad. She just wanted to try something new—even if it was "new-old." Think of it as a rediscovery in the new era, she hinted, as she asked about my hopes for the future. As we chatted, I found myself softening, caring less and less after all about just what was in this salad. The marshmallows tasted better than I remembered, their perfect little powdery paunches perched upon my



THIS IS THE EVERYMAN SALAD, THE OUTLIER SALAD. NOTHING THAT WILL SHOW UP IN ENCYCLOPEDIAS, BUT CONSEQUENTIAL ENOUGH TO SPARK A MOMENT OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN YOU AND A STRANGER AT WINN-DIXIE

tongue. I found it difficult to avoid sticking a pinkie into the Cool Whip for a taste. Now that I am an adult and no longer balk at mixing my food, I started to imagine just how good the pecans might taste bumping up against the pineapple, and wondered about walnuts for next time. I stirred everything together, and as the pistachio powder began blooming green, an honest-to-god salad appeared right before my very eyes.

We mused over how or when or why this Trash Salad settled into the American psyche and canon of foodstuff, particularly in the South. My later research confused me just as much as the dish once did-a lot of poorly documented stories emerged that all seemed real enough to the person telling them, but with factual misfires. The Watergate Salad moniker arose either due to the fact that the dish became popular during the Watergate scandal era or because a sous-chef at the Watergate Hotel invented it (the hotel doesn't confirm or deny). Then the trail led to Helen Keller, naturally. Keller documented what she called the Golden Gate Salad in the 1925 cookbook Favorite Recipes of Famous Women, minus the Jell-O and with the addition of delightful surprises such as celery, "French marrons, broken up with syrup," and a topping that consisted solely of mayonnaise and thick cream. The Alabama native named it such because she had been served a similar dish in California. This early rendition of Trash Salad almost satisfied my curious heart, but I wanted more.

Eventually, I found, all roads lead to the mother of all Trash Salads: sweet ambrosia. While the South can't take full credit for the ambrosia salad, dappled with bright red maraschinos and flaked with angel-soft sweetened coconut, we certainly elevated it to royalty status, a thing of lore and myth and absolute resolve as not simply a riposte to savory Southern Christmas spreads but a centerpiece. You can practically trace ambrosia's rise in popularity over the course of the twentieth century alongside the

dawn of country-wide citrus distribution, wartime rationing, the industrialization of food by way of canning and packaging and refrigeration, the evolution and standardization of grocery stores, and the deep shift in agriculture and foodways that followed.

But the Great American Trash Salad, so obviously derived from ambrosia? No such grand storyline, no great traditions. Just a scrappy salad, reeking of desperation yet riddled with ingenuity, the green (or pink, or orange) derelict little sister of royalty, a Princess Margaret hungover and smoking in her bed and drinking black coffee until noon, a little frayed and perhaps even slightly cheap if you look too closely but still far more glamorous, and way more fun, than her queen sister.

This is the everyman salad, the outlier salad, the people's history of the United States salad. Nothing that will show up in encyclopedias, but consequential enough to spark a moment of understanding between you and a stranger at Winn-Dixie about what it means to relish being a human in this time and place.

As the day went on, I became beguiled by the salad, checking it as it chilled in the fridge, hoping it wasn't getting weird, rooting for it to stay fluffy and light (it did). Mom and I finished assembling the other Thanksgiving dishes, still quietly discussing the disappointments and heartbreaks of the last few years. The detritus of life that never gets documented in any official way. Yet you still whisper the details to your mama in the kitchen when you can, knowing her ears are witness enough to your struggles and urges and hopes and dreams.

We could finally wait no longer, succumbing to our curiosity. Mom grabbed two spoons. I grabbed the Trash from the fridge. We ate damn near half of that salad standing up in a late-night kitchen, just the two of us, laughing and talking and enjoying every single bite of that delicious mess as if I had never hated it, as if I had known all along that one day, I'd give in.

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BY JOHN T. EDGE

Sublime Seafood

AT PÊCHE, ONE OF NEW ORLEANS' FINEST FISH HOUSES, NICOLE MILLS EXPANDS THE PALATE





"Say hello to your new best friends," says a guy in a blue suit with a lanyard around his neck. Just past noon, the front bar at Pêche, set in a mansard-roofed corner building walking distance from the New Orleans convention center, is packed

tighter than a barrel of herring. As he squeezes his foursome into a three-stool space, light cuts through high-arched windows, bouncing off a beautifully patinated mirror rescued from a Bourbon Street gentlemen's club.

Charcoal studies of redfish line the walls. Oyster watercolors, too. Rendered in clean lines, they broadcast the surety of this kitchen. Above a hammered-nickel tub holding ice and bottles of wine, a French Empire chandelier sparkles. A clutch of unicorns, an unofficial symbol of this tenyear-old seafood restaurant, romps across the backbar. We take our seafood seriously, the scene suggests to lanyard wearers like

our new friends, but we never forget that dining out should seed joy and wonder.

My wife, Blair, and I usually show about the time Pêche opens for lunch. (Since the pandemic, many restaurants have cut back to four or five days; Pêche serves seven days a week, opening at eleven and closing atten.) Buttressed by timbers that look like they could hold up a highway overpass, the big dining room is raucous and welcoming. But we like to grab a spot at the back corner of the bar, where we can watch a restaurant at the height of its powers come alive.

Four local attorneys in seersucker and poplin hunker at a tabletop disappeared by two massive snappers, roasted on the wood-burning hearth and painted with



From left: Grilled whole redfish with salsa verde; chef Nicole Mills in the Pêche dining room.

jewel-bright salsa verde. Trays of iceddown oysters get passed around the table of a family of six as the four-year-old twins fight over beer-battered fish sticks dunked in kimchi mayonnaise.

As dishes leave the kitchen, stacked on the outstretched arms of servers, we swivel to follow. There goes the beet salad, bound with creamed avocado, tossed with mint and crushed almonds. Here comes the spicy ragù, made from ground shrimp and served in a tangle of noodles. Steam whirls from a carrot sticky toffee pudding, capped with a boll of cream cheese ice cream and scattered with candied pecans.

Ryan Prewittled the kitchen when Pêche opened in 2013. Donald Link and Stephen Stryjewski, his partners in what is now Link Restaurant Group, advised. A couple of years prior, on a research trip, those three chefs traveled to Uruguay, where they ate big hunks of meat cooked over live fires. That experience inspired an idea: To take advantage of the bounty of the Gulf, what if we built a restaurant that revolved around wood-fired fish cooking?

Cocktail Hour

Soak up the Black Cat Streetcars rumble and sway past Le Chat Noir, a recently opened restaurant three blocks from Pêche. Up front, in the bright barroom, ohef Seth Temple and crew serve a dozen different oysters. Appetizers like fried green olives stuffed with sausage make ideal ballast for cooktails. Martinis, pleasantly heavy on the vermouth, come in chilled coupes and ring up for eight bucks at happy hour. Should the drinks inspire you to try your hand at home (or your hotel), the restaurant is four blocks from Keife & Co., the best liquor store in town.—JTE

Nicole Mills worked on that Pêche opening team. A native of the Philippines, she grew up in the city of Cagayan de Oro in Mindanao, where her mother ran a dim sum stall. Before settling in New Orleans, Mills studied and cooked French-inspired foods in New York City and Los Angeles. At Pêche, she connected the cooking of her homeland to New Orleans. (Filipinos have lived and worked in South Louisiana since at least the mid-1800s.) Now she leads the kitchen, weaving together the flavors of Southeast Asia and South Louisiana.

Snapper ceviche came first, inspired by a version her mother makes with fresh co-conut milk. Filipinos call this *kinilaw*, Mills tells me, when I dial after Blair and I eat two Pêche lunches in four days. Mills's version relies on sweet potato puree, radishes, and chili oil. Back home, cooks make *laing* with braised taro leaves and coconut milk. At Pêche, Mills cooks the dish with kale.

Mills isn't trying to reinvent Pêche. Her gumbo, floated with oysters and shrimp and spears of okra, still relies on briny stock and a deep brown roux. Grilled chick-

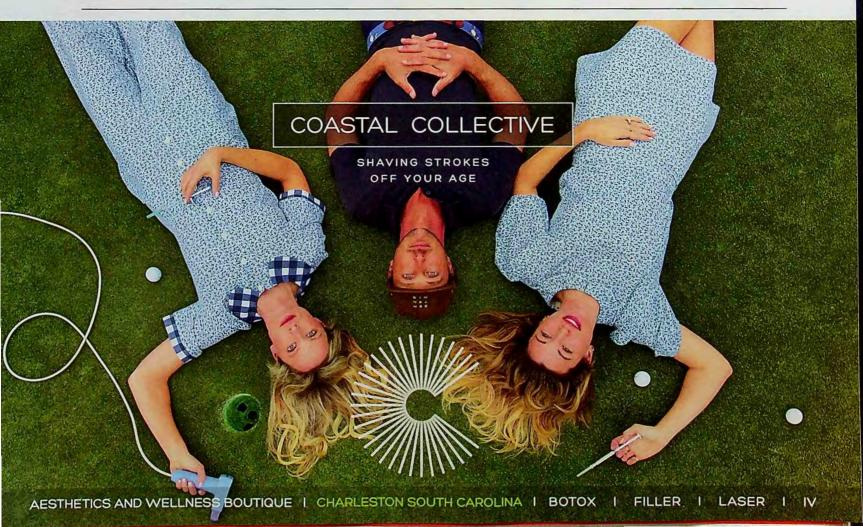


PÊCHE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A DIFFERENT SORT OF NEW ORLEANS FISH HOUSE. IN A CITY WHERE MOST FISH GETS FRIED AND DRENCHED IN SAUCE, THIS RESTAURANT MADE ITS REPUTATION ON BRIGHT AND BUOYANT FLAVORS

en thighs, on the menu since the restaurant opened, still get slathered with Alabama white sauce. Mills works within the framework she inherited, adding subtle updates that reflect her homeland, the evolution of her cooking, and the multiethnic makeup of her adopted city.

For the shrimp toast, another openingmenu dish, she adds garlic and ginger and a sweet chile glaze. Fried oysters now come with a slaw tossed with pickled pumpkin and roasted pumpkin seeds. Some Pêche dishes already spoke to her. Fried catfish, draped with pickled greens and served in a vinegar and chile broth, reminded her of sinigang, a Filipino dish that gets its sourness from tamarind.

Pêche has always been a different sort of New Orleans fish house. In a city where most fish gets fried and drenched in sauce, this restaurant made its reputation on bright and buoyant flavors. Now Pêche is different in new ways. Ten years back, watching regulars embrace dishes like whole roasted fish and catfish with greens, Nicole Mills saw her future. Developing a Pêche take on kinilaw, Mills knew she could contribute. To mark what New Orleans will tastelikein another ten years, regulars and conventioneers alike now converge in this joyous dining room. "We've gotten them ready," Mills says, speaking of her customers and her adopted city. "We've opened them up." G



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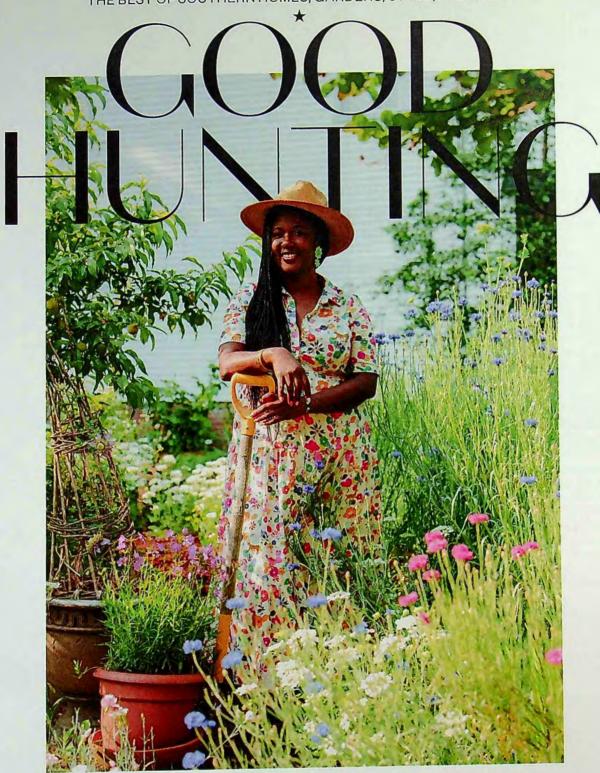
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IN THE GARDEN

Tending a Dream

WHEN THE FARMER-FLORIST DEE HALL COULDN'T FIND A SOURCE FOR LOCALLY GROWN FLOWERS NEAR NORFOLK, VIRGINIA, SHE PLANTED HER OWN

By Laura Drummond

GOOD HUNTING

he delicate hellebores open first, in late winter, and then come the tulips in Dee Hall's garden in Norfolk, Virginia.
The Tidewater region's warm climate soon ushers in ranunculus and peonies, and by late summer, dahlias put on their big-bloom show.

Four years ago, when Hall tried to find local flowers for her wedding, she came up empty-handed. An idea sprouted as she remembered the Caribbean gardens of her grandmother and great-grandmother, in St. Lucia. "Gardens have always been part of my life," she says. "The sense of wonder and excitement never goes away." On the bit of earth around her house, she started with a base of pollinator-friendly native plants and layered in colorful yarrow, snapdragons, and celosia. Soon neighbors volunteered their yards, too. Hall now tends about an acre all told for her company, Mermaid City Flowers, which she started

in the fall of 2020. Formerly empty, grassy lots now teem with mint, garden phlox, and Saint-John's-wort, providing flowers and greenery for events, workshops, and her monthly "bouquet subscriptions."

Hall next set about cultivating a community, founding the Tidewater Flower Collective so that other floral pros in the area could compare notes on seasonality and collaborate. "I never feel like I'm in competition with the growers here," she says. "We root for everyone's success." She expanded her network wider when, in 2021, she started Black Flower Farmers, an international group of growers, including families who sow plots in North Carolina, folks in Kentucky who have a monthly flower arrangement club, and a farmer in South Africa. "People are happy to share opportunities, lend their expertise, and discuss challenges they may have faced," Hall says. "It's been invaluable to have a place with other people who are like me in an industry that doesn't have many of us."

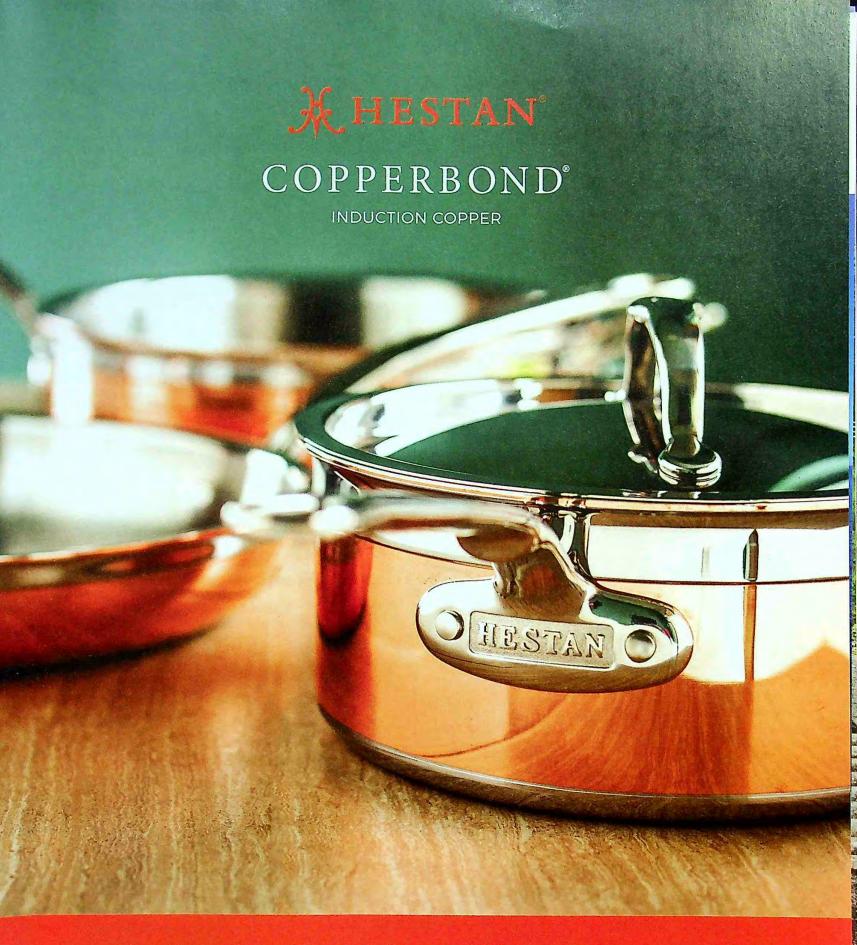
Now when she walks among her sunflowers and cosmos, choosing bridal flowers, Hall thinks about the community of gardeners she's nurtured and the lives that thrive on her land—it's listed as a monarch butterfly way station and a National Wildlife Federation certified wildlife habitat. "It's alive with buzzing, chirping, and croaking," she says. "There's so much hope in a garden."





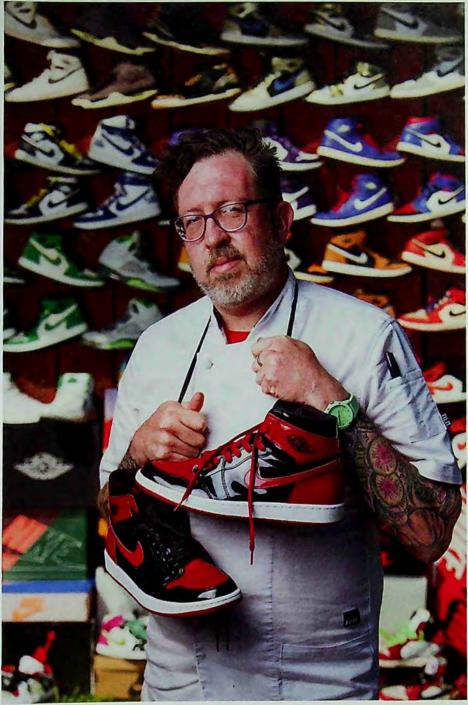
From top: Pollinatorattracting plants include blue bachelor's buttons; Dee Hall's cutting garden around her Norfolk home; Hall tends a swath of white lace flower blooms.





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Chef Travis Milton with his "Reimagined"/
"Patent Bred" Jordan I high-tops.

n the day last April when a vintage pair of Air Jordan sneakers, previously worn by basketball icon Michael Jordan himself, sold at Sotheby's auctionhouse for an astounding \$2.2 million, chef Travis Milton was sporting a

pair pulled from his own copious and valuable collection of Jordans, and most likely dripping gravy all over them.

Milton, the chef at Hickory, a farm-totable restaurant at Nicewonder Farm & Vineyards in Bristol, Virginia, has built his reputation on proudly showcasing the ingredients and traditions of Appalachian cuisine. While racking up accolades, he's also been compulsively amassing squadrons of Air Jordans, the coveted basketball shoes Nike first introduced in 1985. Indeed, his hoard, currently hovering around 450 pairs, would be the envy of any sneakerhead, as those in the avid shoe-collecting community are called.

"My great-grandfather played for Marshall University and was a huge basketball fan," Milton says. "I remember going over to his house to watch the famous 1986 Bulls-Celtics playoff game with Jordan breaking the scoring record. From then on, I wanted a pair of Air Jordans, but we lived in rural Castlewood, Virginia, and it wasn't like we could afford them."

He finally saved enough to buy his first pair, the Air Jordan 6, during high school. (Nike releases new style iterations and colors annually, along with reinterpretations of retro editions, further fueling collector frenzy.) That scratched his itch until a handful of years ago, when a retro Jordan 1 pair in "Hyper Royal" blue beckoned from the window of a mall Foot Locker in Richmond. "Then I figured I'd go ahead and buy another pair while I was at it," he says. "From there, it snowballed into the most expensive and space-occupying habit I've ever had."

COLLECTIONS

Sole Kitchen

CHEF TRAVIS MILTON SERVES UP A MOUTHWATERING BATCH OF AIR JORDANS

By Steve Russell

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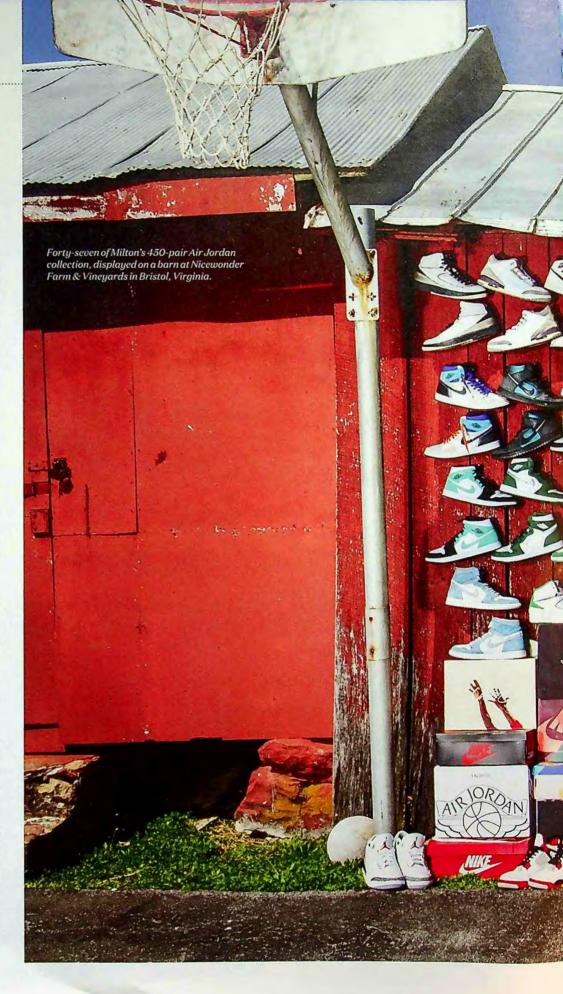
GOOD HUNTING

Beyond the memories of his greatgrandfather that Air Jordans evoke, Milton admits to a deeper link between his affinity for the sneakers and his identity as a chef. "Even though I grew up in Appalachia, I was a kid who listened to hiphop and punk rock and spent a lot of time trying to lose my accent and disassociate myself from living there," he says. "Then, as I started making a name for myself and re-embraced my roots, there was pressure to look the part, to have a long beard and wear a trucker cap. I really lost myself in the brand for a while. One of the first things I did to regain my mental health was to say, 'Screw that,' and still be the guy cooking cornbread and ramps, but do it while wearing punk band T-shirts and Jordans. Every inch of me is from here, but my Jordans buck the stereotype of what might be expected from me."

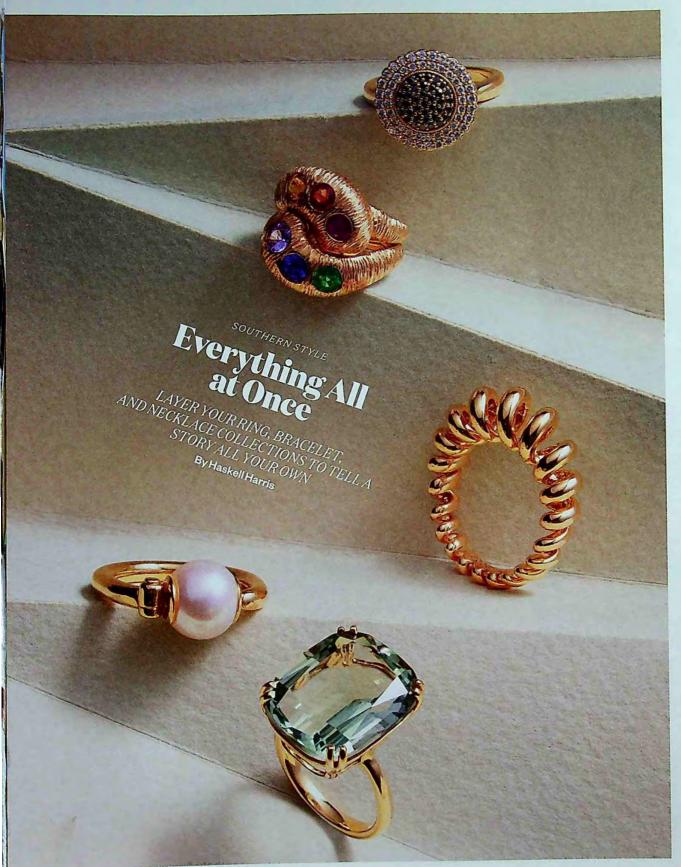
Currently residing in a farmhouse with little storage, Milton repurposed his home office as a display room for a portion of the collection, those from his favorite era encompassing the first six Jordan editions. "There are some more sitting in random places if they need to be cleaned," he says. "And I've got my most valuable ones in a temperature-controlled shed, away from the constant temptation of putting them on my feet."

Among those rare Airs are a vintage 1987 pair for which Milton traded twenty less-prized pairs, and a pair of Air Diors, a special collaboration between Nike and the luxury fashion house that reinterprets the original 1985 Jordans in subtle gray and white with a less-subtle Dior logo emblazoned across the sole. "Those are very sought after, and go for about fifteen thousand dollars," Milton says. "They are amazing. I put them on maybe once a year."

Don't fret: He doesn't model the Diors while stirring collards or whipping sorghum butter. Still, he owns about fifty pairs he swears he'll wear anywhere, including a hectic kitchen during dinner rush. Fortunately, Milton actually enjoys removing stains. "When I have a day off, I'll just sit and clean them because it's monotonous and calming," he says. "Look, I'm dressed in a chef coat almost every day of the week, so the only place I can show off my Jordans is around the restaurant. Just today I ordered a new release with colors that match my black-and-yellow aprons here at Hickory. I had to have them."







From top:

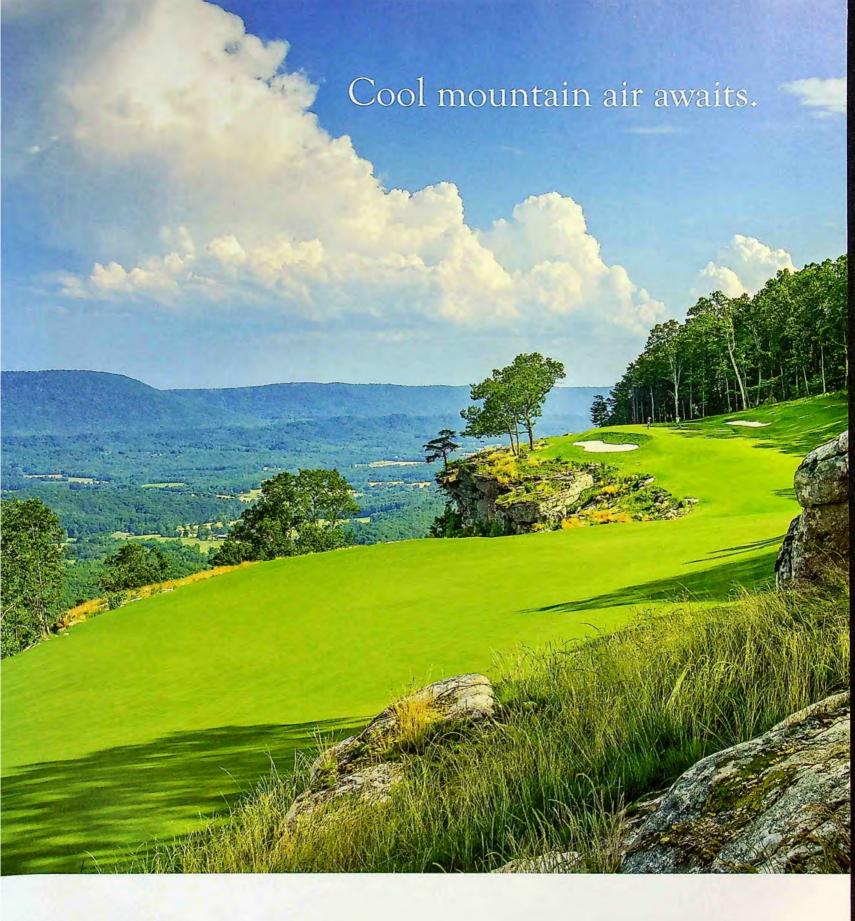
Winding white
diamonds create the
pavé design of this
feminine eighteenkarat-gold piece by
former dancer and
jewelry designer
Jamie Wolf (\$4,000;
elizabethbruns.com).

A rainbow of multicolored sapphires pop in Brent Neale's ultrabold eighteen-karatgold knotring (\$5,950; shop-capitol.com).

why Boochier calls this eighteen-karatgold spiral dome look the Jumbo Slinkee Ring (\$3,340; tinygods.com).

A clever trundle lock gives this Akoya pearl design by Marla Aaron the ability to open and close, allowing it to be worn on the finger or on a chain as a charm holder (\$4,559; croghans jewelbox.com).

Goshwara's pale green prasiolite and eighteen-karatgold cocktail ring packs a gorgeous wallop of style (\$2,600; tinygods.com).



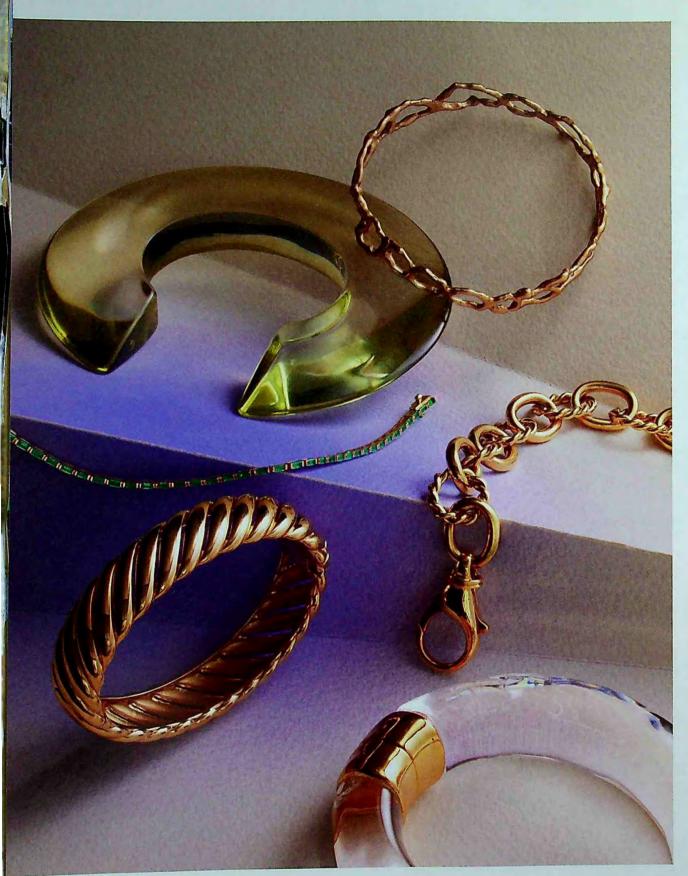
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Clockwise from top:

Undulating
Southern seagrass
inspired the Texas
jewelry designer
Julie Cohn's petite
wax-cast bronze
bangle (\$395;
ggfieldshop.com).

Two link styles—
one twisted, one
smooth—intertwine
to dramatic effect in
this Elizabeth Bruns
design (\$9,550;
elizabethbruns.com).

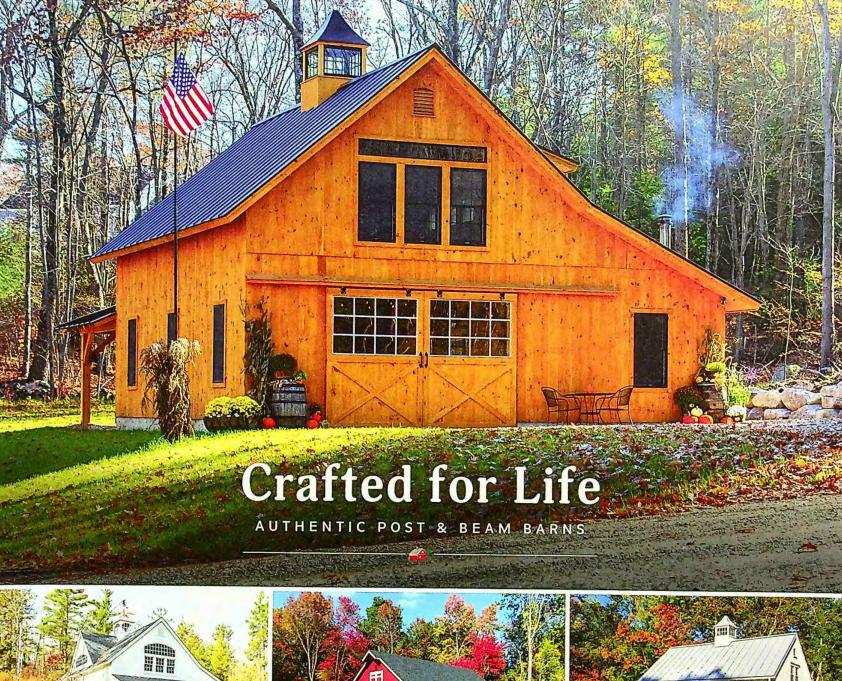
A hinge renders
Alexis Bittar's molten Lucite and gold
bangle easy to slip on
and off (\$295; saks
fifthavenue.com).

This new sculpted eighteen-karat-gold bangle by David Yurman echoes the company's iconic helix form (\$15,000; davidyurman.com).

Slip a bright flash of slinky emerald baguettes by Eriness amid the bigger bracelets (\$3,150; eriness.com).

.

The lime resin cuff by Lizzie Fortunato catches the eye when worn on its own but also blends brilliantly with other pieces (\$195; shop.lizzie fortunato.com).









The BARN YARD



From top:

A zodiac-inspired Azodiac-inspired eighteen-karat-gold charmand chain by Van Cleef & Arpels reflect the life and tastes of the wearer (\$2,430; van) arpels.com).

This delicate strand from Pearls by Shari plays beauti-fully with others, and fully with others, and both the eighteen-karat-gold beads and the Akoya pearls adjust easily for a cus-tomized look (\$2,500; pearlsbyshari.com).

A hexagon charm set with white diamonds animates this heirloom-worthy eighteen-karat-gold chain by Harwell Godfrey (\$8,995; tinygods.com).

Throw a vivacious costume vibe into your fine-jewelry mix with a turquoise and freshwater pearl stunner by Lizzie Fortunato (\$220; shop .lizziefortunato.com).

The combination of eighteen-karat yellow gold and sterling silver links in this chain from Silver Linens Jewelry creates a compelling texture (\$400-\$600; silverlinens jewelry.com).



HOMEPLACE

River Song

IN THIS NANTUCKET-MEETS-LOWCOUNTRY COTTAGE, THE NATURAL WORLD DRIVES DESIGN

By Stephanie Hunt

rossing the narrow bridge over Callawassie Creek that leads from Okatie, South Carolina, to Spring Island feels like driving over a Narnian threshold to wonder. Old-growth maritime forests of live oaks and tall pines dapple sunlight onto the understory saw palmettos and the two-lane below. Spanish moss, cast like one massive shrimp net, drapes everything. Amid this primordial landscape unmarred by billboards or commercial buildings, a small sign announcing FOX SQUIR-REL CROSSING is about the only hint of civilization. Yes, even the squirrels here are of a different order.

"We were awestruck by the beauty," says Nancy Serafini, a Bostonian who, with her husband, Joe, began visiting the Lowcountry twenty-some years ago. After numerous stays at the nearby Chechessee Creek Club, they decided to look for a more permanent foothold, falling quickly under Spring Island's spell. "We loved this peaceful sanctuary embraced by all these live oaks," she says. "It spoke to us in a way no other place has."

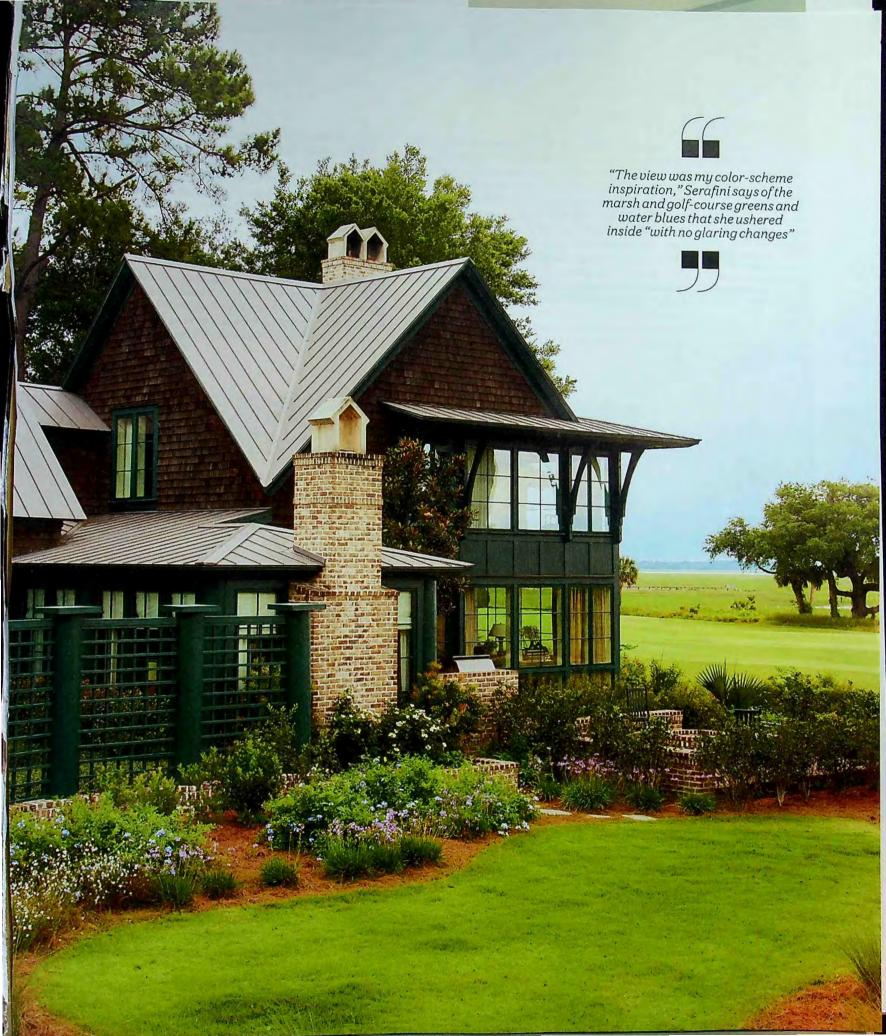
Though enchanted by the island's dense woods and three thousand acres of protected habitat, the Serafinis, who for years had a summer home on Nantucket, held out for a spot on the water, so when a sunny lot featuring expansive Chechessee River and golf course views became available in 2015, they jumped. Bonus: The lot-once owned by Arnold Palmer no less-not only had enough sunshine and space for Serafini to garden, but it also came with ready-to-go plans drawn up by Joel Newman of Thomas & Denzinger Architects. "Joe wanted to get the house built fast, and the plans, with their cedar-shingle New England-y feel, were great. I loved that the front entry was hidden, and of course, that spectacular bank of windows," says Serafini, who used her three decades of experience in running her eponymous design firm to modify the plans for functionality, particularly for optimal views and extra storage space in the three-bedroom cottage. "I'm not sure Joel understood how many clothes women have," she says, laughing.

To make room for china and serving pieces, they carved out a nook in the dining area that now harbors

Nancy Serafini and Rocco; designed as a porch, the enclosed sunroom layers patterned fabrics and custom seating. Opposite: The house and its sweeping marsh views.







GOOD HUNTING

Custom tiles from Boston's Waterworks line the kitchen. Opposite, clockwise from left: The living room; a circa-1880 New England landscape and linens from Courtland & Co. in Savannah adorn the primary bedroom; Sanderson wallpaper in a bathroom adds a splash of color.

a vintage pine cabinet topped by an antique Nantucket weather vane. A front porch with an outside fireplace had hugged that tucked-away entrance, but pollen allergies made it virtually unusable, so the Serafinis enclosed it, creating a cozyanteroom with a herringbone brick floor, forest-green ceiling and trim, and a sofa fluffed with Kit Kemp pillows. "And look here," Serafini says, sliding open adark green barn door that conceals a slim counter initially intended as an outdoor food prep and cooking station. "This was designed to be a grill, but I added a sink to make it my flower-arranging nook." Upstairs, where freeing up closet space entailed sacrificing a tub in the primary bath, Serafini, an avowed Anglophile, converted a hall closet into a private soaking chamber, a true water closet, so to speak.

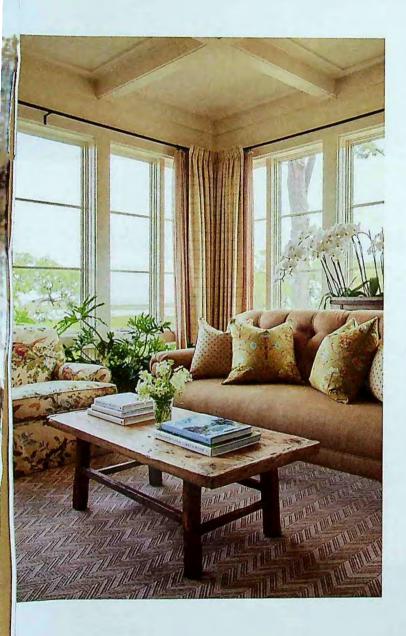
"It's my little haven. Very proper English, right?"

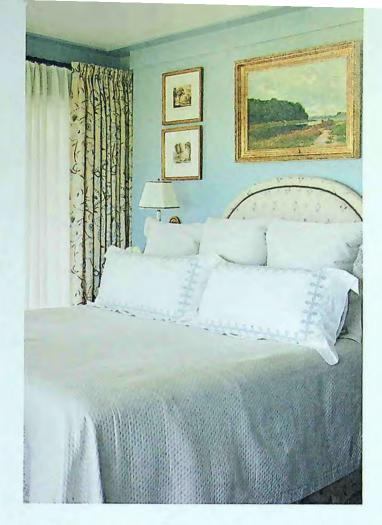
Throughout the home, she opted for custom light fixtures crafted by the Georgia artist Eloise Pickard and shiplap walls, preferring their warmth and texture, all painted in soothing Farrow & Ball hues. "The view was my color-scheme inspiration," Serafini says of the marsh and golf-course greens and water blues that she ushered inside "with no glaring changes." She re-covered living room furniture from her Boston home in a neutral medley of hand-blocked and woven prints, pairing them with tramp art side tables and planters "schlepped from Paris" to add whimsy. "I love the wood texture of tramp art-that it's all handmade and quirky," she says. Custom cabinets flanking the fireplace showcase her collection of Nantucket light-



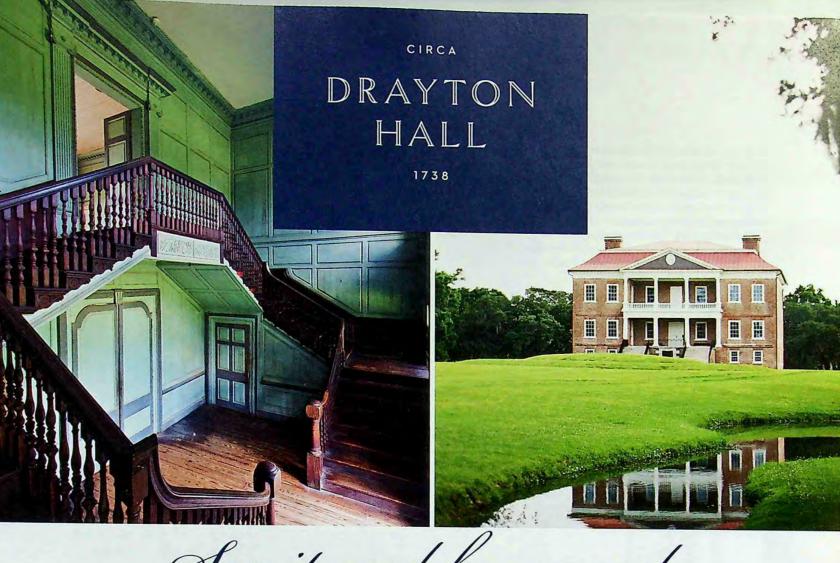
ship baskets, Canton porcelain, and books. "I always say that a house is not a home without antiques, books, and plants," says Serafini, who finds the most joy in the way her art collection—a fanciful mix of vintage signs, folk art, Swedish shorebird prints in the stairwell, bird sculptures, and even a Chagall—all fits.

Speaking of art: "Joe, the dead squirrel has toppled over on the top shelf," she alerts her husband, hoping he'll climb up and adjust the fallen taxidermied fox squirrel they ended up with years ago. "That's the least of its worries," Joe replies. "Rocco chewed its ears off," referencing their mini English goldendoodle. Such is life on Spring Island, where nature takes top shelf, Rocco has the run of the place, and "decorating" means deferring, happily, to breathtaking views.









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BY JAKE FORREST LUNSFORD

Dude's Last Hunt

A MARINE SAYS GOODBYE TO A LAB WHO WAS THERE FOR IT ALL



ome stories begin at the end. This ending begins with me standing in a Georgia swamp, a place we call the Buzzard Roost, twin barrels smoking and tears dropping into the water. Three sons staring at their father, not knowing what to say. A braced pair of wood ducks hanging over a branch of a pignut hickory. One friend knowing everything, saying nothing. An empty dog stand nailed to a water oak.

For the first time in fourteen years, my finger touched the trigger of a shotgun that morning without Dude sitting beside me. I didn't know if the gun would even work without him. Sure, it would $fire, and \, may be \, even \, a \, bird \, would \, fall \, from \, flight. \, But \, for \, it \, to \, work,$ my swing needed to follow the gaze of an old Lab with eyes too blind to see and ears too deaf to hear, but experience too deep to ignore. Without Dude, I felt lost in the fog of that swamp.

I left Franklin County, Georgia, in 2004. The war was raging in Iraq and Afghanistan, and I wanted to serve my country, so I swallowed my fear of failure and stepped onto a bus bound for Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina. Nineteen years, five tours, and counting, and I'm still not sure I understand what we gained in the end, or what great lesson there was to learn. But as a young marine fresh from combat in the Helmand River valley, I didn't yet have the circumspection of age, and with an arrogance reserved only for fools, I decided to buy a dog, as if man can actually own a dog.

Dude was no Old Yeller or Little Ann. I was loyal to him, and he was loyal to anyone holding a hot dog. Despite the story I want to tell, there were never any beautiful homecomings. No stepping off a Greyhound, seabag in hand, home from the war, to find my loyal hound waiting patiently. Dude wasn't that kind of dog. Homecomings with Dude looked a little more like this: Man returns from war. Man embraces wife and children and forgets to shut the door in his excitement. Man spends the rest of the evening on his first day home searching the neighbors' compost piles for a remorseless, trash-eating glutton.

But however those homecomings went, he was always there. Afghanistan, Iraq, Africa, and two tours on naval aircraft carriers. Dude was there to reintroduce me to my home range after each one. He was there for the birth of my three oldest boys and missed the youngest by only a few weeks. He was there when the hour was late and the house was silent, but the ringing in my ears wouldn't let me sleep. He was there for the conversations I couldn't have with anyone else, and his black fur absorbed my tears like swamp water.

His being there began in the spring of 2008, a product of an adon Craigslist I saw while I was still in Afghanistan. Same place I found my first truck. Same place I found my first apartment. Sometimes, the same place I found my wife (depending on how generous she's feeling about my storytelling). The thing about that ad that meant the most to me, a boy far from home, was that he was from Georgia. He and I had the same origin story.

He had a blue collar, like me. That's how the guy who owned his mother knew him from the rest of the litter. The one with the red collar was the dominant male. The pink-collared female could barely make eye contact. The one with the black collar latched himself onto my leg for the thirty minutes my then fiancée and I observed them. But the one with the blue collar made no impression, nor was he impressed. He responded only to food. It was to be the hallmark of his existence. I paid the man \$400 in cash, and two days later the pup boarded a flight with me back to Camp Pendleton in California.

I kept calling him "dude," so that is what I named him. He didn't want to retrieve, so we did force-fetch in the parking lot behind my Craigslist apartment. He wouldn't stop barking when I left for work, so I put him in my Craigslist pickup and took him with me. He loved popcorn, so I taught him to use his nose by hiding kernels all around the 525 square feet we called home.

In the process, Dude and I became inseparable. We were like an otherwise fine shotgun with mismatched barrels. I was particular, and he was particularly *not*. I was focused to the point of missing meals, and he was focused on getting them. We were oil and water, and I loved him.

Dude was also something I desperately aspired to be as a marine: unkillable. Neither overdosing on pain medications I once left unattended, nor consuming a full block of arsenic he found in an adjacent cabin on a family camping trip was enough to put him in the ground. But much as I wanted to believe he was invincible, certain things, like taxes, are inevitable.

In his last few months, I had a rare respite from military obligations. No predeployment workups, no late nights reading every book ever written about some faroff place, and no war. I was home. And in being home, I witnessed the rapid decline of my old dog. More than that, every day he became weaker represented the whittling away of the single constant we'd had in our lives as a marine family in a time of war. Dude was leaving us.

On his final day, I lifted him into another Craigslist pickup and drove to the new vet. Because of the pandemic, she was the only vet within thirty miles of our new duty station in New England who was accepting patients. The receptionist gave me an odd look but didn't ask questions when I asked her to microwave a bag of popcorn before I brought him in. I placed his bed on the floor of the visitation room and informed the vet that I didn't give a damn about her COVID precautions. My Dude was dying today, and I was going to be there with him. With a grace that said she'd seen this all before, the receptionist gave me the still-warm popcorn and led the vet out of the room. I could come get them when we were ready.

As I was lying on the floor with his head in my lap, two memories kept replaying in my mind. On his first hunt, I felled two Canada geese in a retention pond. They were big, and he was as scared of them as if they had been twin grizzlies. With my best friend, Earl, doubled over in laughter and disbelief, I stripped to the skin and dove in with

Dude. I grabbed one of the geese, pushed him the other, and we brought them to shore together. Dude would go on to become a professional pile driver of geese. I think he knew I had his back.

On his last hunt, I dropped a greenwinged teal drake. With all the enthusiasm of a yearling pup, he broke through the ice and snatched the drake from the water. Then he looked at me with eyes that said, You need to come get me because I can't make it back. It was only ten yards, but it felt like a lifetime carrying him back to that dog stand on the water oak, greenwing in his mouth, knowing he would never stand in the Buzzard Roost again. Earl was there for that one, too, as was a new young spaniel my boys named Tucker. This was his first hunt, and there was fire in his eyes.

Ilay with Dude for an hour, feeding him one kernel at a time until the bag was almost empty, talking to him and crying about things he didn't understand before I went to get the vet. He died with a belly full of kettle corn. Orville Redenbacher's, his favorite.

To see him off right, I placed his ashes beside me in the new Craigslist pickup and drove 957 miles south to Georgia, south to home. When I arrived, Earl and I had a few beers, retold a few stories, and reloaded a box of 20-gauge #2 steel shot with Dude's ashes, each yellow hull becoming an urn. On the last and final day of that season, we waded silently into the waters of the Buzzard Roost. Surrounded by my sons, my dearest friend, and Tucker, I stood alone.

As dawn broke, I looked down into the water, hiding my face from both the searching eyes of ducks overhead and from the impending finality of the moment. In the mirrored surface, I saw the reflection of a black dog sitting on the stand beside me. His eyes were skyward, gaze tracking the coming migration. No longer suffering from the struggles of old age, he was strong again, and I cried as the force of his memory washed over me like a tide.

The whistle of wings crescendoed, and the report of twin barrels shattered the silence as gray ashes mixed with the still-lifting fog. A pair of wood ducks fell into the mist. Tucker's legs churned like the beating of my heart as he followed Dude's wake into the marsh grass. Returning from the fog, a burning torchin his eyes, he brought the birds to hand. Ritual complete, homage paid, and a good dog gone.



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Flesh and Bone

DESCENDANTS OF INDIGENOUS TRIBES CONNECT AT GEORGIA'S OCMULGEE MOUNDS

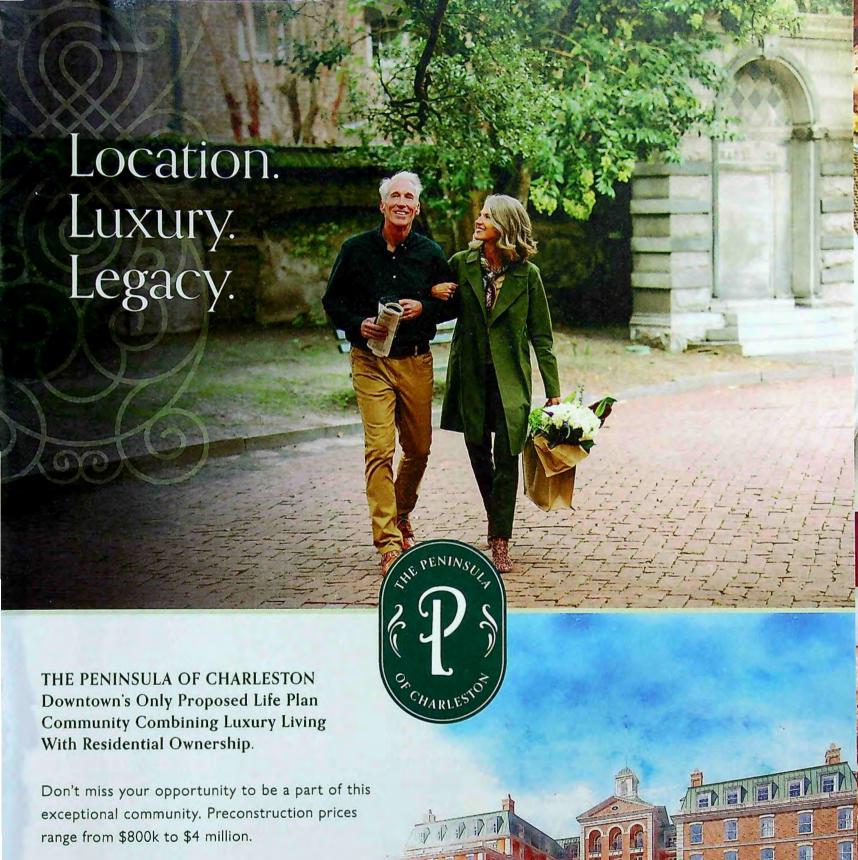


own in the heart of Georgia, where the hilly Piedmont plateau meets the flat Coastal Plain, the Ocmulgee River bends through the landscape. Along those riverbanks, a civilization emerged, and for at least twelve thousand years, Indigenous tribes have called this place home and left evidence behind: a Clovis point spearhead from 10,000 BCE, earthen pottery made around 3,500 BCE, and European dishware from the 1700s. The most arresting, however, is a series of earthworks, some of which rise fifty-five feet high, called the Ocmulgee Mounds.

The Early Mississippian people built seven mounds at Ocmulgee and hundreds of others across a vast but interconnected territory, stretching from Florida west to Texas and as far north as Wisconsin; in the Late Mississippian period, they constructed two more in

the Ocmulgee floodplain. Each of those mounds served a different purpose. They built one over a ceremonial cornfield. The leader of the community lived atop the Great Temple Mound, where he had the best view and could monitor potential threats. The site's now-reconstructed Earth Lodge hosted gatherings and ceremonies. Burials happened at some. Today, more than a thousand years on, they loom on the edge of Macon, a beacon to their descendants.

One weekend each September, the Muscogee (Creek) people answer the call, assembling there as their ancestors once did to commemorate their connection to this place—and to remember the hardships and traumas that generations of their families endured. Ahead of my visit to that Ocmulgee Indigenous Celebration last fall, I spoke with Tracie Revis, the director of advocacy forthe Ocmulgee National Park & Preserve Initiative. "Our people



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are still here," said Revis, a citizen of Muscogee (Creek) Nation who is also of Yuchi heritage. "People talk about us as if we're the dinosaurs of this land, creatures that no longer exist. We didn't stop existing; we just went someplace else."

That displacement peaked in 1813 with the Creek Indian War. By 1821, a series of treaties had forced the Creek from this rich river bottomland so European settlers could use it for agriculture, pushing the tribe west to present-day Oklahoma. Other tribes—including the Choctaw, the Cherokee, and the Chickasaw—met the same fate. When President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act in 1830, any tribal members who remained in the Southeast had to march to Oklahoma, too.

The Muscogee (Creek) call their removal the Road to Misery, and when they left, they took their fires with them, holding a bit of their culture close. Around the flames, they

danced and passed down the tales that kept their traditions alive. "We still have our songs," Revis said. "I have stories that I got from my grandma, who got them from her great-grandma that she was raised by, about removal. We still sing the songs that we sang on the trail." Since the 1950s, Revis's family has journeyed between Okmulgee, Oklahoma, and their ancestral homelands, and she grew up with the Ocmulgee Mounds as part of her identity.

As I emerged from the forest around the mounds on the day of the celebration, the thrum of a hand drum beat like a rapid heart, pulsing through the sacred site. Revis pointed out that the event emphasizes education, not spectacle; that's

why the group invites the public. For generations, her ancestors and their culture were subjected to physical and cultural genocide, and the imagery surrounding the Muscogee (Creek) filled with errors. They do not call this gathering a powwow, for instance, as Western tribes do. No one wears elaborate headdresses here, as the people of this region did not traditionally don them. Vivid color filled the scene, though, from the rich hues of the wood being hand carved into a canoe to the bright skirts worn by the women at the center of the

dance ring with tin cans tied around their shins, the metal glinting from underneath their hems. "We've been erased from the way this region's history has been taught and told," Revis said, "and now we're making sure we are a part of that story."

After the tribes' removal, plantations and farms that occupied the land showed little regard for the mounds' original purpose or significance. The economic ambitions of Macon, which was founded in 1823, spurred the region's industrial age, and in 1843, a railroad company constructed a line right through the Ocmulgee Mounds site, destroying a portion of the Lesser Temple Mound. A second line built thirty years later ravaged part of the Funeral Mound.

As the land was developed, human remains and artifacts surfaced, and the selling of those relics and display of the remains became part of the attraction of the mounds. In 1936, the federal government

declared seven hundred acres around seven of the mounds a national monument, shielding them from further degradation. That didn't stop people from pillaging, so archaeologists began to dig in earnest, eventually removing two and a half million artifacts. Later, in the 1960s, Interstate 16 would tearthrough the terrain again.

Still, despite the challenges, the tribes consider the Ocmulgee Mounds a good example of the government collaborating with and involving them in decisions. That has not been the case at every sacred Indigenous site. Some still operate as curiosity shops, using words like *primitive* and describing a long-gone people, as if their descendants don't exist. The

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, which was intended to guarantee the return of remains to their resting places, passed in 1990, but it is hard to enforce. Even academic institutions have come under scrutiny: The University of Alabama, for instance, is working to repatriate the remains of thousands of people originally buried at a Central Alabama site it operates called Moundville. That process has been an uphill climb, though, for Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole people who trace their her-

itage back to that place, as the university long insisted that the tribes have no claim because they can't prove the bones belong to their direct ancestors.

The Muscogee (Creek) Nation is still searching for ways to protect what's left of its ancient artifacts, village and mound sites, and burials. "There's a lot of artifact hunting and artifact selling happening on Facebook," Revis explained. "We want federal protections for all our ancestral sites." In Georgia, it seems the government is listening. In 2019, legislation redesignated Ocmulgee Mounds as a national historic park and tripled its size to include more of the traditional Muscogee (Creek) property. Up next: Hopes are high Congress will sign off this year on Ocmulgee Mounds National Park & Preserve-Georgia's first national park-which would knit together the current park with nearly nine hundred nearby culturally significant spaces such as the Bond Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

Revis told me that she and other Muscogee (Creek) Nation members find solace on the Georgia grounds. "I'm walking out among the mounds and along the property and I smell our medicines, what we still use today in our ceremonies," she said. To understand what she senses, on the day after the celebration, I returned to the mounds to experience the space sans crowd. As the sun rose over an earthwork, I made my way across the bridge and down the walkway that leads to the Earth Lodge, the floor of which dates to 1015 CE. The railways still run through the park, and as I turned onto the Opelofa Trail, I could hear the whistle of a freight train in the distance. It was cool enough that the alligators seemed to have retreated from the clay pond. An anhinga startled me as I ambled along the path beside Walnut Creek, the bird twisting its S-shaped neck as it dried its plumage.

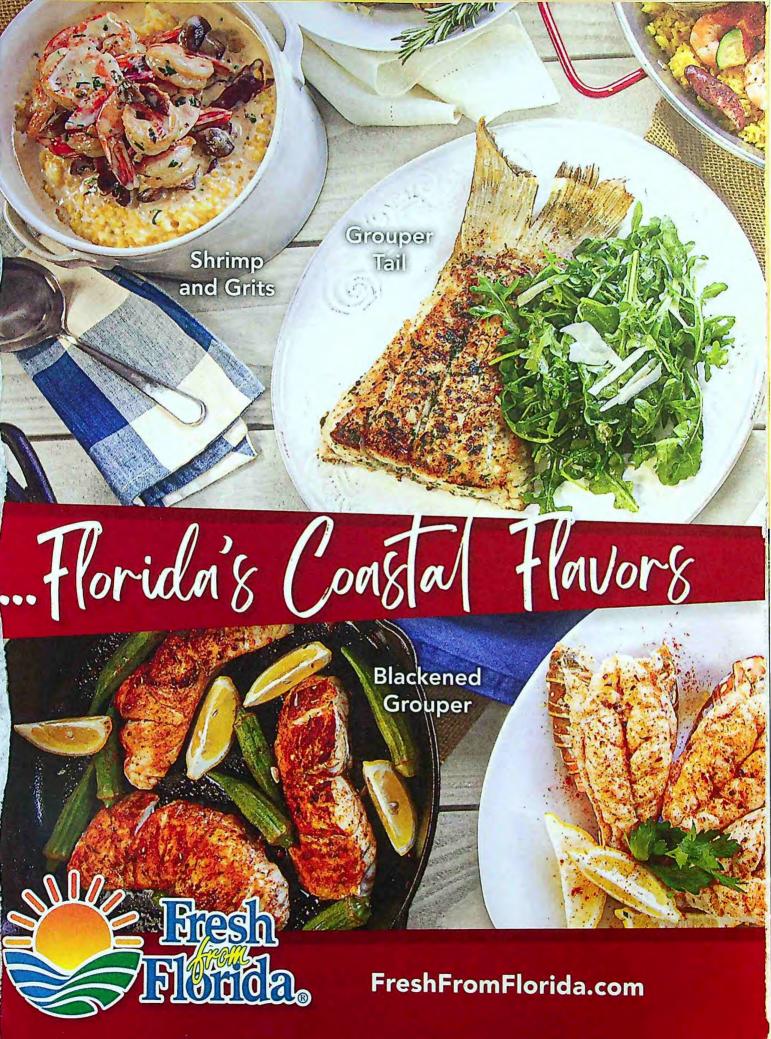
The ground brimmed with history. Beyond the mounds, the landscape contains remnants of colonial forts, African American cemeteries, and two Civil War skirmishes, too. I wondered how many bodies lay under my feet, undetected. I thought about how to show them reverence.

I completed the trail loop and made my way up the slope toward the top of the Great Temple Mound, where the tribal leader once stood. From there, I could see the downtown Macon skyline, the manmade structures of steel and glass. Different types of monuments.



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PEOPLE
ARE STILL
HERE.
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WE'RE THE
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BY VIVIAN HOWARD

Rules of Rural Etiquette

FINGER WAVING, GROCERY GREETINGS, AND OTHER ESSENTIALS

O

n our drive home to Deep Run one afternoon, as I hugged the inside lane of the "bad curve" on John Green Smith Road, a wrinkled gentleman subtly raised his index finger and tipped his cap as his nineties-model Ford pickup puttered past. With a muscle memory carved from countless miles on country roads, I deftly returned his salutation. My son, who at twelve almost always rides shotgun (but

almost never detaches his eyes from his phone), turned to me, perplexed, and asked, "How do you know that man?" I told him I had no idea who he was, but I knew it was good manners to reciprocate a finger wave. I had learned by example—I grew up watching my parents (and everybody else who drove me anywhere) do it on the two-lane roads around here. Theo's response? "Weird."

Determined that my kids get a dose of country mouse to balance the city slicker traits I've apparently nurtured, I gave Theo an impromptu lesson on how to be cordial the country way, demonstrating how to throw up his own finger and nod his noggin at every car, truck, and El Camino that came his way. After explaining what exactly an El Camino looked like and lamenting its demise, I expounded on the magic of the index wave: The gesture renders you polite with minimal effort.

The salute had felt natural to me back when just about everyone in Deep Run farmed, and that synergy of season and purpose, combined with our relative solitude, made where we lived feel more like a lumbering neighborhood than an isolated address. Even if you didn't know the person you were finger waving to, there was a good chance you were (or soon would be) connected by blood, marriage,



business, or church. And even though most of our community's multigenerational family farms reached the end of their lines when the tobacco industry died and the children moved to places with stoplights, the habit stuck hard.

Theo wasn't having it. He had seen me put on decent clothes and concealer before a trip to the Piggly Wiggly too many times, he said, to believe we lived in any kind of rural anonymity. He wasn't wrong. Going to the grocery here can feel like an upside-down awards show, where everybody knows you and can't wait to report back on how you look. Not only that, but it comes with its own rural courtesies: Even if they catch you fishing a Lean Cuisine out of the frozen section, you're required to acknowledge them and answer any and all questions about your private life. They feel obliged to ask because they watched the movie of your childhood from their church pew-and they feel cheated because all the Oscar-worthy stuff happened afterward.

So yes, perhaps some things have remained the same in Deep Run, but I was still hell-bent on highlighting the ways our community used to be more connected; how we just naturally acted more hospitable, kind, and generous with one another. And how those interactions had made living in a place without sidewalks, parks, or population worth it. It was a different time, and I was prepared to sneeze nostalgia all over it to prove a point to my twins.

I began with the time their dad and I had just moved to a cabin down a long path in Eastern North Carolina, and our elderly neighbors approached our home by car at night, unannounced. Because we had lived in New York for years and never met a neighbor on purpose, we hid in the bathroom till they left, genuinely confused by their intentions. The next day, when E. D. and Tessie Mae crept back down our dirt drive around noon, we reluctantly let them in, and they welcomed us to the crossroads with a pile of home-cured pork products and an invitation to Pleasant Hill church.

It came as no surprise to Theo and Flo that their Jewish father and recovering-Baptist mother gratefully accepted the ham, seasoning meat, and sausage but declined the group worship. Still, the visit didn't impress the twins, who were also well aware of the startling effect of neighbors (in their case, grandparents, aunts, and uncles) dropping by with no warning at



I DECIDED TO TAKE A MORE DIRECT PATH TO JUXTAPOSING MY TWINS' DEEP RUN CHILDHOOD WITH MY OWN AND ANNOUNCED THAT THEY WERE GOING TO SIT DOWN AND WRITE THEIR FIRST-EVER THANK-YOU NOTES-IMMEDIATELY

all hours, so I needed to dig deeper for a story that spoke more clearly to their 2023 preteen sensibilities.

I landed on telling them about Tom Heath, who every Saturday morning used to bring us four chickens he had cooked on the coals left from barbecuing a pig for Deep Run's erstwhile B&S Café. We didn't lock our doors back then, of course, so Mr. Heath would just come on through the carport door and drop the foil-covered metal bowl on the table. The room I shared with my sister Johna opened to the kitchen, so we would rise on weekend mornings to the aroma of smoke and vinegar-laced charred chicken. Although the memory remains one of my favorites, and Tom's chicken inspired my blueberry barbecue chicken that both Theo and Flo love, they found the image of their aunt and me gnawing on legs and wings in our twin beds less than enviable. Flo then added that we only recently started locking our doors and she is the one who locks them.

Outwitted a little by my offspring, I decided to take a more direct path to juxtaposing their Deep Run childhood with my own and announced that they would start at that very second to show audible signs of respect for their elders. That meant they would respond to me with "Yes, ma'am" and "No, ma'am" and I would be hearing a lot more "please"s and "thank-you"s coming from their direction as well. In addition, they were going to sit down and write their

first-everthank-you notes-immediately.

I coupled the news with a much different wave of my index finger than the one I stretched out toward the wrinkled man in his truck, and for once, no snickers emerged. I took the reverence as a sign I should fetch the thank-you cards and follow through with my demands. It was going to be tricky, though; the only things I could find that resembled stationery were postcards announcing my book tour in 2019.

Determined not to squander this teachable moment, I grabbed construction paper and scissors and went about cutting and folding something that looked appropriate for a kindergarten thank-you. Hopeful that, since my kids had never dabbled in hard-copy gratitude before, they wouldn't recognize how amateur my red and blue cards looked, I dashed back and gave my pupils the brushstrokes of what their notes should cover and how to address the envelopes when I eventually bought them.

At this point, I hadn't heard any "Yes, ma'am"s or "please"s yet, and I could tell they were humoring me more than honoring me, but Theo and Flo seemed ready to write, and I knew that if I planned to turn this ship around and raise proper country children with good manners, this was a step in the right direction. Two thank-you notes in, Theo and Flo had done their part. Now I just need to put the cards in the mail—the box, not the post office. That would take up another hour. @

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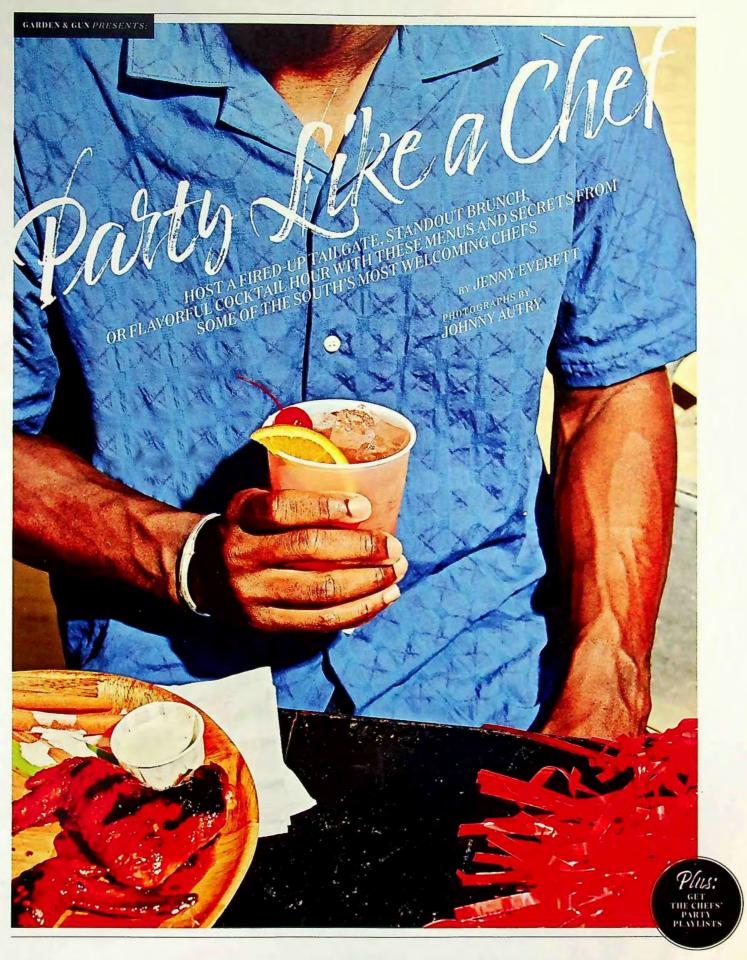


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On college game days — specifically when the Georgia Bulldogs are playing—Southern Soul Barbeque, on St. Simons Island, is packed with fans of football and food. Starting in the morning, bar manager Sophie Kammer batches up drinks, like her Bulldog Smash, a Georgia-fied version of a Bahamian classic. Meanwhile, co-owners Griffin Bufkin and Harrison Sapp fire up a rotating selection of game-day eats, including grilled chicken wings, slathered in a Cheerwine-based barbecue sauce, and smoked fish dip, a local favorite. "The game is blasted on all the TVs as everyone settles in for a good time," Bufkin says. It's a champion-worthy spread—and one easily re-created at your own tailgate.

ON THE MENU:

Grilled Chicken Wings (Cheerwine sauce, chile, lime, garlic)

Smoked Fish Dip (catch of the day, Old Bay, Duke's)

The Bulldog Smash

(rye, peach and ginger liqueurs, orange, cranberry)

FOOD RECIPES BY

Griffin Bufkin and Harrison Sapp

DRINK RECIPE BY

Sophie Kammer



Grilled Chicken Wings Yield: 12 servings

Chefs' notes: "We love how the Cheerwine wings have that deep burgundy color and how the sweet black cherry glaze balances the spice. When it comes to grilling, embrace the char it helps the sauce stick."

INGREDIENTS

Iliter Cheerwine soda Itbsp. minced garlic 2 tbsp. cornstarch 2 tbsp. water ¼ cup lime juice ¼ cup soy sauce 1tbsp. red pepper chile flakes 48 chicken wings (or drumettes), salted Ranch dressing, for serving Blue cheese dressing, for serving Carrot and celery sticks, for serving

PREPARATION

Make the sauce: Pour Cheerwine into a saucepan and simmer on the stove until reduced by half, about 1 hour. Meanwhile, toast minced garlic in a toaster oven for a few minutes until crispy (or on a lined sheet pan in a 350°F oven for 5 to 7 minutes). Mix cornstarch and water in a bowl to make a slurry. Bring reduced Cheerwine to a boil and whisk in cornstarch mixture to thicken. Remove from heat and stir in lime juice, soy sauce, toasted garlic, and chile flakes. Set aside until ready to use (refrigerate if you're making in advance to bring to tailgate).

Grill the wings: Prepare a charcoal grill for medium-high heat. When coals are ready, arrange chicken on oiled grill grates, cooking in batches as needed. Brush with Cheerwine barbecue sauce. Cook, turning every few minutes, applying more sauce often, until the chicken's internal temperature reaches 165°F, about 15 to 20 minutes. Pull the wings off the grill and toss with the remaining sauce in a mixing bowl. Serve with ranch or blue cheese dressing, along with carrots and celery, if desired.

Smoked Fish Dip

Yield: 16 servings

Chefs' notes: "This dip always goes fast when we put it out. Our favorite fish to smoke for dips is local king mackerel. It has the perfect oil content and stands up to the smoke. Mullet and mahi-mahi are also really good, but any smoked fish or even oysters will work with this versatile base."

INGREDIENTS

I quart (4 cups) Duke's mayonnaise % Ib. cream cheese, softened I tbsp. Texas Pete hot sauce 2 tbsp. fresh-squeezed lemon juice Itbsp. Worcestershire sauce Itbsp. Old Bay seasoning Fresh parsley, I big handful, chopped 2 tbsp. minced shallot 2 tsp. horseradish 1/4 cup heavy cream Itbsp. capers (optional) 3 lb. of your favorite smoked fish (store-bought or homemade), flaked

PREPARATION

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together all ingredients except fish. Make sure everything is fully blended, then fold in the fish. Transfer to a large, shallow serving dish and serve with crackers and veggies.

The Bulldog Smash

Yield: 16 servings

Chefs' notes: "This batched drink is inspired by the classic Bahamian cocktail the Goombay Smash as a tribute to the national champion Georgia Bulldogs. Our version replaces the rum with rye whiskey and peach liqueur but retains its subtropical vibes with fruit juices and a splash of Giffard ginger liqueur. We like the way the rye holds its own with the sweet fruit flavors."

INGREDIENTS

4 cups Thirteenth
Colony rye whiskey
2 cups Blended Family
No. 4 peach liqueur
2 cups Giffard Ginger
of the Indies liqueur
4 cups fresh-squeezed
orange juice
4 cups cranberry juice
Orange slices, for garnish
Cherries, for garnish

PREPARATION

Pour all ingredients except garnishes into a clean 1-gallon jug (any leftover tea/lemonade/milk jug will do). Shake to combine. Put in cooler to transport. At the tailgate, fill 16-oz. stadium cups with ice. Give the jug another few shakes if it's been sitting for a while, then pour cocktail overice, Garnish with an orange slice and a cherry.



Since opening the popular Vern's in Charleston, South Carolina, last year, co-owners Bethany and Daniel "Dano" Heinze have been spending nearly every evening in the restaurant's kitchen. So when the couple is looking to recharge with friends and family, brunch is a go-to. It's also an ideal meal for entertaining, not only because of the inviting menu options (Eggs! Hash browns! Pancakes!), but also because it sets the tone for your guests' whole day. "Bethany's momis a brunch host master, always frying up bacon and eggs in the morning when we visit their home," says Dano, the executive chefat Vern's. "The smell immediately sparks hunger and excitement for what's ahead." When the Heinzes invite guests for brunch, they lean toward dishes that can be prepped in advance and offer some lighter bites with big flavors, like their crunchy salad, a frittata with homemade romesco sauce, and a fluffy stack of benne seed pancakes topped with seasonal fruit and drizzled with honey. Bethany, the restaurant's beverage and operations director, has a favorite brunch drink, too: the Vern's Michelada, inspired by visits to a favorite beach dive in Los Angeles, where the couple lived for five years. "Brunch is a methodical meal," Dano says. "It needs enough sustenance to prevent people from becoming hangry, but also needs to be light and energizing so it can carry everyone forward into the rest of their day."

ON THE MENU:

Benne Seed Pancakes

(apple butter, whipped ricotta, honey)

Roasted Potato and Fennel Frittata

(hash browns, eggs, Parmesan, romesco sauce)

Chicory Salad

(bitter greens, herbs, bread crumbs, garlic confit vinaigrette)

The Vern's Michelada

(beer, tomato juice, Tabasco, Tajín)

FOOD RECIPES BY

Dano Heinze

DRINK RECIPE BY

Bethany Heinze





Benne Seed **Pancakes**

Yield: 18 (5-inch) pancakes

Chef's notes: "The recipe itself was inspired by Danish ebelskivers, which incorporate whipped egg whites to make a fluffy pancake. The airy cake with the nutty benne seeds is both decadent and light-just like we like our brunch. We love highlighting the seasons with a house-made jam and fresh fruit on top, drizzling honey to pull everything together."

INGREDIENTS

For the apple butter: 5 large Honeycrisp apples, cored and chopped 2 tbsp. water 11/2 tsp. apple cider vinegar

For the whipped ricotta: 2 cups ricotta cheese Itbsp. local honey I tsp. powdered sugar 1/4 tsp. kosher salt 11/2 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil

For the pancakes: 8 large eggs, separated 11/2 cups plus 3 tbsp. water 11/3 cups whole-fat Greek yogurt 10 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted 2 cups plus 4 tsp. all-purpose flour 1/2 cup granulated sugar, divided 1 tbsp. kosher salt 1 tbsp. baking powder Grape-seed oil 3 tbsp. benne seeds, toasted 2 pints blackberries 1/2 cup wildflower honey



Scanthe QR code for the Heinzes' brunch playlist.

PREPARATION

Make the apple butter: Combine apples and water in a medium saucepan and cook, covered. over low heat. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the mixture is soft and has a rich, dark amber color, about 2 to 3 hours. Remove from stove and cool slightly. Blend on low speed with an immersion blender. Cool to room temperature, then stir in apple cider vinegar. Cover and refrigerate. Remove from the fridge about 30 minutes before using.

Make the whipped ricotta: Combine ricotta, honey, powdered sugar, and salt in the bowl of a food processor and process until cheese is smooth and fluffy, about 30 seconds. With the processor running, drizzle in olive oil until completely combined. Refrigerate in an airtight containeruntil ready to use.

Make and assemble pancakes: In a large bowl, whisk together eggyolks, water, yogurt, and melted butter until completely combined. In a separate bowl, combine flour, 1/4 oup sugar, salt, and baking powder, and mix thoroughly. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment or in a large bowl using a handheld mixer, whisk the reserved egg whites on low speed until just combined. With the mixer running on medium-high, slowly add the remaining 1/4 cup of sugar and whip the egg whites just until they hold stiff peaks when you lift out the whisk attachment but are still glossy. Set aside while you begin mixing the batter.

Add the combined dry ingredients into the egg-yolk mixture, stirring until just combined. Add 1/3 of the whipped egg whites to the batter and gently stir in. Add 1/2 of the remaining egg whites and gently fold in to combine. Repeat with the remaining egg whites.

Heat a large nonstick skillet over medium heat and add 1 to 2 tbsp.grape-seed oil. Add 1/3 cup of batter to the skillet for each pancake, lightly smoothing out the surface. Cook as many at a time as your skillet will hold, allowing 1/2 inch of space between pancakes and adding another tbsp. or 2 of

oil in between batches as needed. Sprinkle 1/2 tsp. of to asted benne seeds onto each pancake. When you start to see bubbling on the surface, about 3 minutes, flip each pancake and cook for an additional 2 minutes. Transfer pancakes to a plate and lightly cover with a kitchen towel to keep warm until you're finished cooking.

To serve, assemble pancakes in stacks of 2, adding a spoonful of whipped ricotta and a dollop of apple butter between layers. Top each stack with a dollop of whipped ricotta, making an indentation with the back of the spoon, and fill with more apple butter. Add a few fresh blackberries and drizzle with honey.

Roasted Potato and Fennel Frittata

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

Chef's notes: "We're big fans of potato rõsti-a.k.a. hash browns!-andsoftscrambled eggs. This frittata brings those two elements into one dish and is a bit easier to execute ahead of time rather than standing over the stove while you could be enjoying your company." The finishing touch is inspired by a traditional Spanish romesco sauce made with tomatoes, chiles, and hazelnuts. "Romesco is a versatile condiment that really complements the frittata and adds a lot of flavor."

INGREDIENTS

4 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil Itbsp. butter 2 cups russet potatoes (about 11/2 potatoes), peeled and grated 1tbsp. plus I tsp. salt, divided 1/2 cup onion, diced 2 cups fennel, shaved thin (approximately I large fennel bulb) 15 large eggs, whisked thoroughly (should yield 3 cups) I cup Parmesan 1 tbsp. fennel pollen (available at specialty grocery stores) Itbsp. fennel fronds (the frilly tops of fennel), minced Itbsp. chives, minced Calabrian Chile Romesco

(recipe follows)

PREPARATION

Preheatovento 350°F. Heat a large, deep nonstick ovenproof sauté pan over medium heat. Add olive oil and butter. Once butter is melted, swirl pan a couple of times to distribute butter and oil. Toss potatoes with 1 tbsp. salt. Add potatoes and onions to the pan.

Using a rubber spatula, move the potatoes and onions around to evenly distribute for about 1 minute. Then use the spatula to mash the potatoes together to form a cohesive hash brown the size of the bottom of the pan. Place shaved fennel on top and press the fennel into the potatoes. Cover pan with a lid and let cook until the fennel is slightly wilted and the bottoms of the potatoes are golden brown and crispy, about 5 minutes.

Stirremaining1tsp.ofsaltinto whisked eggs, then pour over the fennel and potatoes, distributing evenly. Top with Parmesan, fennel pollen, fennel fronds, and chives. Let eggs continue to cook until they start to set at the sides of the pan, about 3 minutes.

Place pan in the oven and bake for 15 minutes until eggs are completely set (a toothpick should come out clean). Remove frittata from pan and let cool. Portion into desired number of slices.

Place a big spoonful of Calabrian Chile Romesco sauce on each plate, and serve the frittata on top.

Calabrian Chile Romesco **INGREDIENTS**

I pint cherry tomatoes 1/2 piquillo pepper, charred and peeled 2 tsp. minced garlic 1/4 cup hazelnuts 1 tbsp. plus 1/2 cup extravirgin olive oil, divided 1/2 cup sherry vinegar 2 tbsp. Calabrian chile paste (available online and at specialty grocers) I tsp. smoked paprika 11/2 tsp. salt 1/4 cup toasted sourdough bread, cut into 1/2-inch pieces

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 500°F. In a mixing bowl, combine tomatoes, piquillo pepper, garlic, and hazelnuts with 1 tbsp. olive oil. Pour onto a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake for 5 to 7 minutes or until tomatoes are slightly charred. Cool to room temperature.

Add the mixture to a high-powered blender along with sherry vinegar, Calabrian chile paste, smoked paprika, salt, and sourdough bread. Blend the mixture on medium speed for about 1 minute. When it starts to form a puree, slowly add ½ cup olive oil while gradually increasing blender speed until it's on high. Blend until smooth and creamy. Can be made the day before and refrigerated. If you refrigerate it, gently warm in a saucepan before serving.

Chicory Salad

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

Chef's notes: "We love to eat a bowl of dressed bitter greens alongside pretty much everything, and brunch is no exception. The lettuces with bread crumbs add a crunchy texture to otherwise soft foods, like eggs and potatoes. This salad reflects the greens grown at our local farms, amped up with a bunch of torn herbs and Parmesan."

INGREDIENTS

For the bread crumbs: 4 cup extra-virgin olive oil 4 thsp. butter 2 tsp. minced garlic 2 cups panko bread crumbs

For the vinaigrette:

1 cup champagne
vinegar

½ cup lemon juice

½ cup garlic confit (storebought or homemade)

2 thsp. Dijon mustard

2 thsp. honey

½ tsp. black pepper

2 tsp. salt

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1½ cups grape-seed oil

For the salad:

2 heads radicchio, cleaned
and cut into 2-inch pieces
2 heads escarole, cleaned and
cut into 2-inch pieces
4 heads yellow endive,
cleaned and cut into
2-inch pieces
1 bunch fresh parsley leaves
½ cup dill sprigs
Zest of 1 lemon
Salt and black pepper, to taste
Grated Parmesan, to taste

PREPARATION

Make the bread crumbs: In a medium pan over medium heat, add olive oil and butter. Once butter is melted, add minced garlic and sauté for 30 seconds. Add panko and stir to combine. Stir continuously, moving the panko around the pan, until browned, about 5 or 6 minutes. Set aside to cool.

Make the vinaigrette: In a high-speed blender, combine champagne vinegar, lemon juice, garlic confit, Dijon mustard, honey, black pepper, and salt. Blend on high until fully combined, then slowly blend in olive oil and grape-seed oil. Set aside.

Assemble the salad: Combine radicchio, escarole, endive, parsley, and dill. Toss in vinaigrette. Sprinkle with lemon zest, and salt and pepper to taste. Toss again. Portion into individual salad bowls and top with bread crumbs, grated Parmesan, and more black pepper.

The Vern's Michelada

Yield: 12 servings

Chef's notes: "When we lived in Los Angeles, we were first introduced to Micheladas at our local hang in Venice Beach called Hinano. It's a beer-only, cash-only dive that opens at 7:00 a.m. and was our absolute favorite. The frothy beer with simply spiced tomato juice and hot sauce has the salty satisfaction of a Bloody Mary, but the effervescent beer keeps it refreshing. Add a little pickled pepper and caper berry garnish, and it's just a perfect breakfast drink."

INGREDIENTS

6 cups tomato juice
(Bethany recommends the
Sacramento brand)
4 cup Worcestershire sauce
2 tbsp. Tabasco sauce
4 cup Bar Harbor clamjuice
4 cup tamari sauce
2 cup fresh-squeezed
limejuice
2 tbsp. kosher salt
1 tbsp. fresh-ground pepper
2 tbsp. Tajin seasoning
4 lager-style beers
Pickled peppers, for garnish
Caper berries, for garnish

PREPARATION

Stir together all ingredients except beer and garnishes in a large pitcher. To serve, coat the rim of a glass with lime juice and dip the rim in Tajín. Fill the glass with ice. Add equal parts beer and Michelada mix, and gently stir. Garnish with a skewer of pickled peppers and caper berries.



Cocktail Party

Between a yearslong, pandemic-delayed house construction project and preparing to open her much-anticipated newrestaurant, Cheetie Kumar hasn't had much time lately for entertaining. But with the opening of Ajjain Raleigh and a finally completed home, she's more than ready to welcome a houseful of friends again. Ajja is the Hindi Urdu word for "come over," which fits Kumar perfectly. "The way I started my cooking career was having a bunch of people over for dinner parties in college," says the chef, who spent much of her early childhood in India cooking alongside her mother and grand mother and later toured as the guitarist in a rock band. "It was thoughtful but never about formality." That's the vibe she channels with this cocktail party menu, which taps into her roots to create unfussy bites with bold layers of flavor. The details-like toasting fresh-ground spices for the rim of her refreshing watermelon-cucumber cooler, or making a tamarind glaze for pork meatballs—take the finished dishes over the top. But she also designed them with pieces that can be pulled together in advance, "so we can enjoy each other during the party." And if you have any of that tamarind glaze left over, all the better. "Put it on rotisserie chicken from the grocery store," she says, "and you'll have an easy meal later that week."

ON THE MENU:

Kuku Sabzi

(egg, soft herbs, tomato chutney, feta)

Pork Koftas

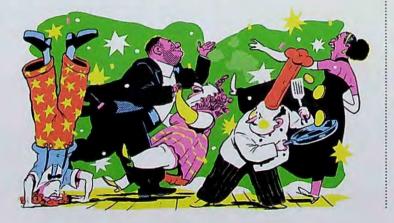
(spiced meatballs, onion, tamarind glaze)

Watermelon-Cucumber Cooler

(fresh watermelon and cucumber syrups, lime, soda, choice of spirits or n/a)

RECIPES BY

Cheetie Kumar



Kuku Sabzi

Yield: 8 to 12 servings

Chef's notes: With its bright green color, this traditional Persian eggand-herb dish will no doubt have guests talking. Out it into bite-size cubes to liven up a spread of other party snacks. "This dish belongs on a table filled with pickles, spreads, cheeses with breads or crackers, and some crisp white wine. It's remarkably better several hours after preparing and can even be served the next day, so it's a perfect dish to make ahead and refrigerate. Just popit in an oven on low to take the chill off."

INGREDIENTS

1 tsp. whole cumin seeds 2 tsp. whole coriander seeds 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, divided 2 lb. sweet onions, julienned 2 tsp. plus 11/2 tsp. kosher salt, divided 2 leeks, white and pale green parts, diced 2 thsp. butter, cubed 3/4 tsp. baking powder 1/4 tsp. turmeric 2 tsp. ground ginger 1/2 tsp. sweet paprika 1 tbsp. dried fenugreek (available online or at specialty grocery stores) 1/4 tsp. black pepper 1/2 lb. (about 4 cups) mixed soft herbs (cilantro, parsley, and dill), cleaned and finely chopped 6 eggs, beaten 1/2 cup walnuts, toasted until fragrant, then chopped 1/3 cup currants Sweet-and-sour tomato chutney (recipe follows) I to 2 oz. crumbled feta

PREPARATION

In separate batches, toast the cumin and coriander seeds in a dry skillet over medium heat. Shake pan frequently, and remove from heat as soon as the spices start crackling, about 5 minutes. Grind with a spice grinder or mortar and pestle; set aside to cool.

Next heat a large, wide sauté pan and add 1/4 cup olive oil. Add onions and sauté over low-medium heat until caramelized, about 30 to 45 minutes.

Add 2 tsp. salt, fold in leeks, and caramelize 10 additional minutes. Onions should be jammy but not too dark. Spread onto a sheet pan to cool (can make ahead and store in fridge for up to 3 days).

Preheat oven to 375°F. Line a 9-by-12-inch baking pan with parchment. Spread 1/4 cup olive oil over parchment, and sprinkle with cubed butter. In a bowl, add baking powder, 1/2 tsp. ground to asted cumin, 1 tsp. ground to asted coriander, turmeric, ginger, sweet paprika, dried fenugreek, 11/2 tsp. salt, black pepper, and chopped herbs. Fold in the onions.

Place the pan in the oven to melt the butter. Fold beaten eggs into the herb mixture along with walnuts and currants, gently combining all ingredients. The mixture should be thick and a little glossy.

Remove pan from oven. Scrape egg-herb mixture onto pan. Spread it evenly with a spatula and then quickly push the mixture away from the sides of the pan, so the edges are somewhat rounded (because pan is warm, it will set quickly in this position).

Bake for 12 minutes, then check to see if the center is firm to the touch. (Can take longer depending on oven. Check every couple of minutes once it seems close.) Invertionto a larger sheet pan or cutting board. Cool completely at room temperature. Can be made a day ahead and refrigerated.

Before serving, warm briefly in a low oven if refrigerated, cut into bite-size cubes, and top with tomato chutney and crumbled feta.

Sweet-and-Sour Tomato Chutney Yield: 11/2 cups

INGREDIENTS

6 Roma tomatoes (about 11/2 lb.), cut into 8 wedges each 11/2 tsp. kosher salt 2 tsp. plus 3/4 cup sugar, divided 2 thsp. extra-virgin olive oil I cup apple cider vinegar 11/2 tsp. ground cumin 2 tsp. ground ginger 1/s tsp. cayenne

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 250°F. In a bowl, toss tomato wedges with salt, 2 tsp. sugar, and olive oil. Place in





an even layer, cut side down, on a parchment-lined sheet pan. Roast until they're shriveled and most juice has evaporated, about 60 to 90 minutes. Cool completely. Meanwhile, combine 3/4 cup sugar and apple cider vinegar in a small nonreactive pot. Simmer and stir until sugar has dissolved. Remove from heat, and cool to room temperature. Scrape tomatoes into a blender. Puree until just broken down. Add vinegar and spices. Puree until smooth. Refrigerate for several hours or up to 5 days. Taste and adjust salt if needed before serving at room temperature.

Pork Koftas

Yield: 16 skewered koftas (or 12 to 14 sliders)

Chef's notes: "The pork koftas are essentially meatballs seasoned with chiles and spices and parbaked ahead of time. You then coat them with this delicious tamarind glaze sweetened with raisins." Serve on skewers for easy noshing, or shape into sliders and pop on Hawaiian or potato rolls with mint and pickled red onion.

INGREDIENTS

For the spice blend: I quajillo pepper (or other medium-hot pepper), stem and seeds removed 1/2 ancho pepper (or other mild pepper), stem and seeds removed 11/2 tbsp. whole coriander seeds 3/4 tsp. whole cumin seeds I tsp. whole black peppercorns 2 tsp. poppy seeds 1stick cinnamon, broken into smaller pieces 1/8 tsp. turmeric

For the onions:

2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil 1 large or 2 small/medium yellow onions, small diced 11/2 tsp. kosher salt 1tbsp. minced garlic Itbsp. minced peeled ginger

For the koftas: 11b. ground pork 1/2 cup cooked white rice 11/2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil (plus more for drizzling) 11/2 tsp. kosher salt 1/4 cup currants 2 tsp. honey Tamarind glaze (recipe follows) Mint sprigs, for garnish

PREPARATION

Make the spice blend: Heat a frying pan over medium-high heat. Add both peppers and cook, flattening the peppers with tongs and flipping often, until fragrant and toasty, about 4 minutes. Remove and cool completely. In the same pan, toast coriander, cumin, and black peppercorns until just starting to crackle, about 5 minutes. Add poppy seeds and cook for another 20 to 30 seconds (shake pan to prevent burning). Transfer to a plate to cool completely. In a spice grinder, whirl the peppers, toasted spices, cinnamon, and turmeric until fully ground. Store in a tightly sealed jar for 2 to 3 weeks.

Make the onions: Heat olive oil in a small to medium skillet over medium heat. Add onions and season with salt. Cook until translucent. Add garlic and ginger and continue to cook until golden, about 2 to 4 minutes. Fold in 2 tsp. of the spice blend and cook for 20 to 30 seconds more. Scrape into a bowl and set aside to cool. (Can be made up to 3 days ahead and refrigerated.)

Make the koftas: In a mixing bowl, combine pork, cooked white rice, 31/2 tsp. of the spice blend, olive oil, salt, 1/2 cup of the prepared onions, currants, and honey. Mix with gloved hands until well incor-



Scan the QR code for Kumar's party playlist. porated, but don't overmix. Chill mixture for 6 hours or overnight.

Preheat oven to 325°F. Roll koftas into small egg-shaped meatballs. Line a sheet pan with parchment, and place koftas about 1 inch apart. Drizzle with olive oil and bake for 12 to 14 minutes until internal temperature reaches 150°F (they will be cooked again). Don't overcook.

Cool completely. These can be precooked 2 days in advance and stored in the fridge.

Before serving, coat (or dip) the koftas in tamarind glaze and bake in a 375°F oven for 5 to 8 minutes until glaze is caramelized and the insides are heated through. Insert skewers for easy noshing. Garnish with mint and serve with your favorite pickled veggies.

Tamarind Glaze **INGREDIENTS**

1tsp. whole cumin seeds Itbsp. raisins 2 tbsp. red wine vinegar 3/4 cup tamarind pulp, thawed if frozen (available online and in specialty grocery stores) 1/4 cup sugar 1 tbsp. brown sugar 2 tsp. chopped ginger Salt, to taste

PREPARATION

In a dry pan, toast the cumin until just starting to crackle, about 5 minutes. Whirlin a spice grinder.

Soak raisins in vinegar and set aside. Combine tamarind pulp, sugars, 1/2 tsp. ground to asted cumin, and ginger in a small pot. Simmer for 5 minutes, until sugar is completely dissolved and mixture is glossy. Remove from heat and let cool completely. Puree tamarind mixture in a blender with raisins and vinegar. Season with salt and transfer to fridge (glaze thickens as it cools). Can be made up to 5 days ahead.

Watermelon-Cucumber Cooler

Yield: 8 servings

Chef's notes: "I can't get enough of watermelon in the summer, and I made this by the pitcherful through the tough summer of 2020. It works equally well with

all the clear spirits-I'm partial to rum-or no booze at all."

INGREDIENTS

For the syrups: 3 cups seedless watermelon chunks 3 tbsp. plus 4 tsp. granulated sugar, divided 2 cucumbers, peeled and roughly chopped

For the glass rims: 2 tsp. whole cumin seeds 5 or 6 whole black peppercorns 1/4 cup kosher salt

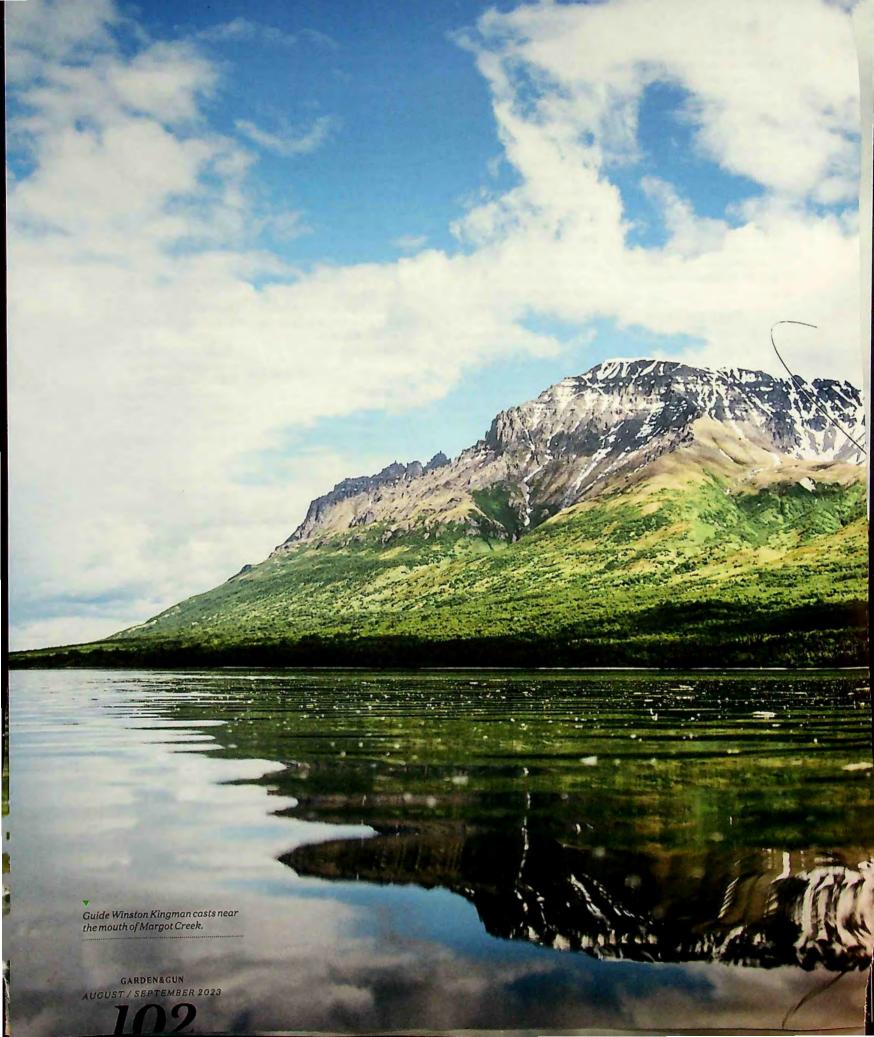
For each cocktail: 3/4 oz. fresh-squeezed lime juice 13/4 oz. silver rum, gin, or vodka (if desired) 11/2 oz. soda water (Topo Chico works great) Mint sprigs, for garnish Cucumber slices, for garnish Lime leaves, for garnish

PREPARATION

Make the syrups: In a blender, puree watermelon and strain through a fine-mesh strainer. Discard pulp. Return juice to blender and whiz with 3 tbsp. sugar to dissolve. Repeat with cucumber and 4 tsp. sugar and set aside. This makes enough of each syrup for 8 cocktails (and can easily be doubled).

Toast spices for the rims: Heat a small dry skillet over medium heat. Add cumin seeds and peppercorns and cook, shaking the pan, until crackling and fragrant, about 5 minutes. Remove from pan and cool before grinding with spice grinder or mortar and pestle. Stir in kosher salt and set aside.

To serve: Rub rim of each glass (Kumar likes an 11 oz. collins or double rocks glass) with a lime wedge and dip in spice mixture to coat rim. Drop in a few ice cubes. For each cocktail, in a shaker add 2 oz. watermelon syrup, 1 oz. cucumber syrup, lime juice, a pinch of salt and grind of pepper, and the booze (if using). Add plenty of ice, shake well, and strain into prepared glass. Stir in about 11/2 oz. of soda (more if omitting alcohol). Garnish with mint, cucumber, and lime leaf. @





THERE'S NO OTHER PLACE ON EARTH QUITE LIKE ALASKA, THE GREAT LAND, WHERE FISHING EXPEDITIONS FOR ITS RENOWNED TROUT AND KING SALMON STILL COME WITH BUSH PLANES, EPIC VIEWS, BROWN BEAR SIGHTINGS, AND THESE DAYS, PLENTY OF LUXURY, TOO

PHOTOGRAPHS BY



Let's see, where would you like me to start?

With the trophy fishing? The majestic bush plane flights? The king crab and Wagyu feast? The deluxerustic lodge? The incident with the twenty-five-pound salmon? The bears? The poem?

I'll start with the fishing.

I was wading American Creek, in Alaska's famed Katmai National Park and Preserve, on the state's southern coast, hunting for monster Dolly Varden and rainbow trout, when my guide, Ryan McGraw, offered a suggestion.

"Let your flies swing," he said. "The really big boys sometimes eat it that way."

I cast into the pool I'd been working for the past ten minutes and let my bugs drift as instructed.

Nothing.

Icastagain. Mend... Drift... Swing...

Still nothing.

McGraw began to walk downstream, the telltale sign your guide is ready to move on to the next spot. I was about to give up on the hole myself, but I cast to one last piece of water, at the very bottom of the run, just to be sure I'd covered the full expanse.

Well, I could tell you about the nineteen-inch Dolly Varden I wound up catching on that cast, or the twenty-one-inch rainbow I caught three casts later—the one that was so hot we had to get in the boat and chase it downstream, where we watched it jump fully out of the water three times before we managed to land it. But instead, I'll skip ahead to the good fish.

That one took all of six casts more to summon up, and from the instant! felt its trike and saw my rod bend practically in half,! knew this wasn't your average Sunday brook trout. In fact, it was a twenty-five-inch Dolly, the biggest freshwater fish!'ve ever caught.

After I released it, I paused to have a moment. In the

previous several days, I had flown 4,311 miles from New York to Denver to Anchorage to the tiny gateway town of King Salmon (population: 327). Earlier that morning, I had puddle jumped from Crystal Creek Lodge, my home for the week, to American Creek in a De Havilland Beaver six-seat bush plane, then jet boated upriver, anchored, hopped into the water, and walked several hundred yards upstream from there. Now I was standing knee-deep in just about the clearest water I've seen, in just about the prettiest stream I've set foot in—a shallow, snaking, grassy-banked jewel—with the sun making a somewhat rare Alaskan appearance and the snowcapped peaks of the Aleutian Range looming in the distance. This was a mere three hours into the first morning of the first day of my trip.

"The things people will do for a fish," I had said to McGraw as we disembarked from the Beaver and sloshed our way through a swampy bit of river to where the jet boat was anchored.

"Yeah," he said. "We're idiots."

I couldn't argue. But the way things were going so far, at least I was a happy idiot.

8

ome states are just states. Alaska is a whole vibe. Towering mountains, vast seas, rushing rivers, and calving glaciers on a scale that's hard to fathom. Epic snow, ice, wind, and rain. Brown bears, black bears, grizzly

bears, and polar bears. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Whales, sea otters, sea lions, walruses, seals, and salmon. Wolves, caribou, and moose. Bald eagles and ravens (and the state bird, mosquitoes). A rich, proud Native culture. Forests and tundra. Sled dogs, kayaks, and bush planes. John Muir and John McPhee. Oil and gold. Is there a more romantic collection of people, places, and things? Far from detracting from its appeal, the state's difficulties—the cold, the remoteness, the relative lack of paved roads—are half the point. In a world with no shortage of human development and creature comforts, they give the place its edge. They keep it wild.

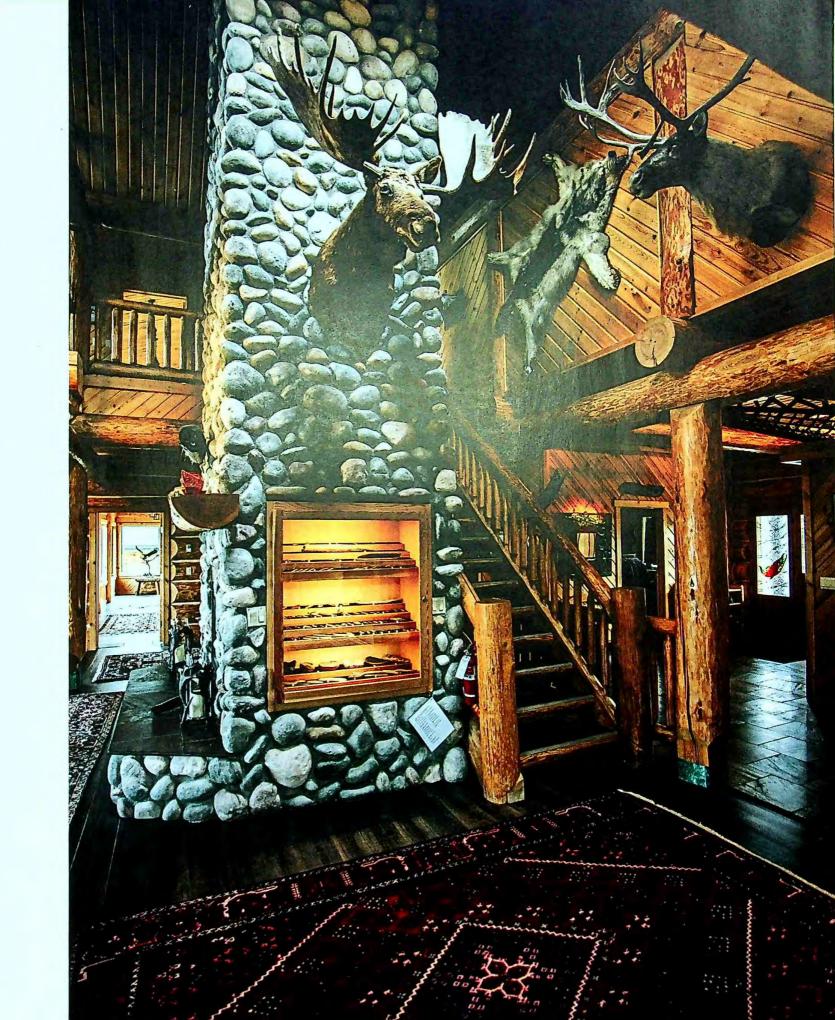
Have I mentioned Alaska is large? In his memoir of traversing the state, *Tip of the leeberg*, Mark Adams writes, "Alaska is essentially a small continent: big enough to hold Texas, California, and Montana (the second-, third-, and fourth-largest states) and still have room left over for New England, Hawaii, and a couple of metropolises." In his vast historical novel *Alaska*, James Michener notes that the word *Alaska* is derived from the Aleut term *Alyeska*, meaning "great land." You could spend a long time trying to come up with a more apt name.

To sportsmen, the state is a haven. Hunters roam its 365 million acres to pursue everything from caribou to waterfowl. Anglers select from a menu that includes, among other sought-after species, arctic char, Dolly Varden, halibut, trout, and the holy grail of Alaskan fishing, king salmon. Generally speaking, the waters



₹
Floatplanes at Crystal
Creek Lodge.

Opposite: Taxidermy and artifacts on disploy in the lodge's great room.







are clean, clear, uncrowded, and well managed, keeping fish counts healthy and offering globe-trotting sport fishers that increasingly rare commodity: genuine aloneness.

Isuppose I count myself among their ranks. I've been lucky enough to wet a line everywhere from Idaho and Montana to Belize and Chilean Patagonia. But I had yet to experience Alaska. My aim was to bomb around in floatplanes, catch my share of larger-than-average salmon, trout, and char, and maybe see a bear or two (ideally from a nonlethal distance). For my home base, Ichose Crystal Creek Lodge, an outfit set hard against aperfect stretch of the Naknek River. Founded in 1988, Crystal Creek has been recognized three times as the Orvis fly-fishing lodge of the year. Though the Naknek is a fine trout stream in its own right, the lodge is primarily a "fly-out" operation, with guests (no more than sixteen at a time) taking off to different locations via its three floatplanes and one wheeled plane. The access to remote spots means they are often casting by themselves to big fish that have seen very few flies.

Dinner that first night started with a Little Gem lettuce and radicchio salad with Manchego cheese, Rainier cherries, and a tarragon vinaigrette; moved on to roast pork collar with polenta, sautéed mixed mushrooms, and caramelized cipollini onions; and culminated with homemade cantaloupe sorbet drizzled with white-chocolate sauce and topped with crushed pistachios.

The basement of the lodge is home to an aviationthemed watering hole called the Beaver Bar, with vintage propeller blades hung from the ceiling and tables made out of old De Havilland engines. When the bartender asked if I wanted my bourbon on the rocks

with one big ice cube or lots of little ones, I had to blink twice to make sure I wasn't in a Manhattan boîte.

I had timed my trip for June specifically because the king salmon, the largest and most prized of Alaska's most coveted species, typically start running then. (Bristol Bay kings commonly tip the scales at fifteen pounds, and thirty-pound fish are not uncommon.) The next morning, the photographer Nick Kelley and I were scheduled to fish for kings. King populations have been declining, and the way we'd set up this trip, it would be our one and only shot at them. When I asked the gentleman seated beside me at the bar how his day was, he told me he and several other guests had been targeting kings themselves. "But we didn't see any," he said. I didn't pursue the issue. I didn't want to rub a sore spot. And I suddenly felt a little queasy.

ush planes hold an almost mythic place in Alaskan culture. In an enormous state without a lot of great roads, they're an essential form of transportation. Look up pretty much anytime, anywhere, and there's a de-

cent chance you'll see one buzzing around. At times you can feel like Henry Hill dodging the helicopters in Goodfellas.

Bush planes are also plain old fun. From just the right height, the views they afford are stunning. It's as if you're a human drone. The flying itself, bombing around in the sparest of machines like some kind of Wright brother, is the stuff of little kids' dreams. Taking off and landing on the water? It's a magic trick that never gets old.

All that said, the planes have their limitations. On day two of my trip, we were headed west, across Bristol Bay to the Nushagak River, home to the largest A Dolly Varden caught in American Creek, in Katmai National Park and Preserve.

Opposite: A view of the creek from pilot Alex Oberholtzer's bush plane.



king salmon run on earth, when a wall of fog appeared over the bay ahead of us. Our pilot, Alex Oberholtzer, exchanged messages with a pilot who had just flown through the murk and reported that he wouldn't do it again if he had the choice. Oberholtzer turned the plane around. Not a single passenger complained.

While we cooled our heels waiting for the fog to clear, I took a self-guided tour of the lodge. Artfully taxidermied bears, wolves, moose, seals, ducks, and fish adorn the walls. Works by local painters and sculptors appear here, gorgeous stained-glass windows there. A lit display case holds armor, arrowheads, and other Native artifacts. I have now seen a walrus penis bone, the Native term for which is oosik. (One of the lodge staff members has a water bottle with a sticker that reads, "Don't be an oosik.") One might expect the hot tub, fitness center, and massage room, but a dedicated, screened-in cigar-smoking cabin came as a surprise to me. Lockers where you can change in and out of your waders resemble the fully tricked-out cubbies proathletes use. Should you wish to go into the lodge after you've wadered up, there are giant rubber slippers to put over your boots so you don't have to take them off, for God's sake.

By 10:30 or so the fog had burned off, and we set out across Bristol Bay for the Nush. Beneath us, we saw the commercial fishing boats, canneries, and processing plants that make up the local salmon-industrial complex. Commercial salmon fishing in Alaska generates hundreds of millions of dollars annually and draws seasonal workers from across the world during the summer. It's a distinctive crew. On my flight from Anchorage to King Salmon, the flight attendant spiel included a reminder that dipping to bacco was strictly prohibited. A help-wanted ad for fishing crew members posted

at the King Salmon Airport specified that applicants must have "no prior issues with authority."

Alittle after 11:00 a.m., Oberholtzer landed the plane on the Nush and chug-chugged to an outcamp where our jet boats awaited. Our guide, Kody Frantz, helped us transfer our gear, then zipped us upriver to the run where we would spend the day.

Here's how fishing for king salmon on the Nush goes: You drop a spinner in the water, stick the butt end of your rod in the rod holder, troll along, wait for a strike, then muscle in your fish. As a friend of mine says, "It's not fishing; it's reeling."

The whole undertaking makes for something of a scene. Dozens of makeshift salmon camps line the banks of the river, and boats with names like Krazy for Kings form an armada in the good runs. On one bank, there's a town called Portage Creek with a year-round population of two: a man and his wife. The man runs for mayor every year, Frantz told us, and votes for himself.

The purist in me was skeptical at first. But as we motored upriver, we saw a bunch of bent rods and heard hooting and hollering. "Looks like the kings are in," Frantz said, meaning the salmon had begun making their annual sojourn from the open ocean back to their spawning grounds. Improbably enough, we had arrived at exactly the right time. Who was I to turn up my nose at that?

It got better. Just a minute or two after I dropped my spinner in the water, I saw my rod tip twitch, then bow. I reeled like mad, and after a short but exciting tussle, I landed my first ever salmon-a gorgeous silvery tenpound, twenty-three-inch king, a keeper. (Local regulations allow you to harvest one fish between twenty and twenty-five inches and one over twenty-five per day, and a total of five fish twenty inches or larger per year.)

Brown bears near Brooks Falls.

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Chef Connor Callahan at Crystal Creek Lodge; a Dolly Varden; guide Ruan McGraw: the Crystal Creek dining room; fresh king salmon on the cleaning table; the aviation-themed Beaver Bar sits in the lodge's basement.

Kelley and I went on to boat a number of nice kings that day. Rarely did we go more than fifteen minutes without one. One of the other pilots, Brian Schanche, who had joined us after lunch back at camp, bagged a handful more, including another keeper. But with less than an hour before we were due to return, we had yet to catch a truly big king.

And then: The next time I saw my rod bend, I grabbed it from the rod holder and started reeling. This time the fish felt stronger, heavier, feistier. It took a good ten minutes of give and take, but I eventually brought it close enough to the boat that we could see it. "Take your time with that one," Frantz said. "That's a good fish."

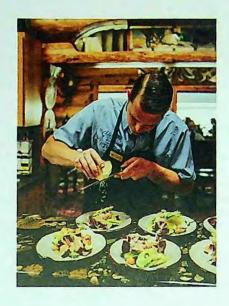
Three times I brought my would-be quarry almost near enough for Frantz to net it, and three times it took off. On my fourth attempt, with my forearm starting to burn, I had it within a foot of the boat, just inches from the net, when I felt a sudden, unholy pop. Just like that, it was gone.

Schanche had been recording the whole affair on video, so I can share with you word for word what I said, in all its insightful glory. The exact quote was "No, no, no, no. no." And then something unprintable. I was dumb enough to ask Frantz what he thought the fish weighed. "At least twenty pounds," he said. "Probably twenty-five."

n my third and final day in Alaska, we were fogged in again. But if ever a three-hour fog delay was worthwhile, this one was. When the mist burned off, the sun came out full throttle, and we headed to world-renowned Brooks Falls, in Katmai National Park and Preserve, where we hoped to see bears. The flight was the most spectacular yet-the sky an impossible royal blue, the mountains and rivers glistening. I asked Dennis Thacker, our pilot that day, if he ever got tired of the view. "You know," he said, "Idon't."

After attending mandatory "bear school" at a park-entrance ranger station ("Don't leave food anywhere." Check. "If a bear charges, don't run-stand your ground." Easier said than done), Kelley, Thacker, and I followed our guide, Winston Kingman, a short distance to an elevated observation platform. The spot was undeniably touristy and a little crowded, and up on the platform there was no real danger of an unwelcome wildlife encounter. And yet, when we spotted a mother brown bear and her cub fording the river in search of salmon, everyone stood mesmerized as the bears swam and fished and splashed around. At one point, they climbed up on the bank and passed within thirty feet of us.

You may have seen our next stop, Brooks Falls, in pictures or on webcams. It's the spot where bears, sometimes lots of them, stand in a virtual lunch line to snatch salmon out of the air as they make their way upstream. Walking the trail, I remarked on the copious amount of bear scat. "You don't need to worry about it," Thacker deadpanned, "unless you see a finger." When we set up to fish about a hundred yards below the falls, we didn't see anything like a pack, but we did spot one male that had planted its rather large ursine posterior just beneath the cascade.













In addition to being potentially savage killing machines, bears are excellent indicators of nearby fish. Within half an hour, I caught a twenty-inch rainbow, stuck and lost a much bigger rainbow (we saw it jump before it broke me off), and netted a twenty-two-inch sockeye salmon, a relatively rare species to catch on

We finished the morning by bushwhacking a mile or so downstream, through a field of tall grass, to what Kingman hoped would be a good run. "This would be an excellent spot to surprise a bedding bear." Kelley said as we hacked our way through the grass. We all laughed weakly. When the run in question turned out to be unproductive, we did what any anglers in our situation would do-hopped in the plane and headed to a new spot.

If there's a prettier place on earth than the mouth of Margot Creek where it empties into sapphire-blue Naknek Lake, I don't know of it. Before we started fishing, we set up a picnic lunch-lamb gyros on homemade pita bread, hot bison chili, Rice Krispies Treats-by the plane. With the snowy peaks of the Brooks Range as a backdrop, we could have been in a beer commercial. Kelley and I completed the effect with a couple of Alaskan Ambers.

Afterward, we waded up Margot Creek. My companions caught a handful of fish, but for the first time in three days, I got skunked. As we headed back to the plane, I decided to try my luck in one last spot. On the very next cast, I caught a pretty sixteen-inch Dolly. I released it and watched it swim away. My Alaskan fishing exploits had come full circle. Dolly to Dolly, dust todust.

helodge's guests for the week, me included, were due to fly home the next day. In keeping with lodge tradition, dinner on our final night was an over-the-top "reef and beef" feast of Alaskan king crab legs and fillet of Wagyu, served with roasted cauliflower, whipped buttered potatoes, and angel food cake with sabayon and fresh sliced nectarines for dessert.

After dinner, in accordance with another lodge rite, Crystal Creek proprietor and co-owner Dan Michels

handed out a few lighthearted awards and then announced he was going to read a poem written by the acclaimed British Canadian poet Robert W. Service, a.k.a. "the Bard of the Yukon."

Michels is a tall, imposing figure with a shock of white hair. A pilot, entrepreneur, angler, food-andwine enthusiast, history buff, gracious host, and master storyteller, he's exactly the one-of-a-kind, self-reliant sort Alaska is known for. Standing at the head of the communal dining-room table, he opened a well-worn jacketless edition of The Best of Robert Service and began to read.

"The Spell of the Yukon" is narrated by a man who came to Alaska during the gold rush and, despite many hardships, fell deeply, obsessively, in love with what he found. In the final stanza, he realizes why he's so drawn to the place.

There's gold, and it's haunting and haunting; It's luring me on as of old; Yet it isn't the gold that I'm wanting So much as just finding the gold. It's the great, big, broad land 'way up yonder, It's the forests where silence has lease; It's the beauty that thrills me with wonder, It's the stillness that fills me with peace.

When Michels finished reading, there was a churchly hush. A few of us may or may not have dabbed at

It's been said that everyone in Alaska is running either toward something or away from something. Service's narrator and the other prospectors came seeking gold; the other guests and I came looking for fish. But the real treasures are ones you can't hold or put a price on. Beauty. Solitude. Adventure.

Back at home a few days later, I made a salmon dinner for my wife, my daughter, her boyfriend, and my son with the keeper king I had caught. I also read them the poem. On my last night in Alaska, I had told Heather Oberholtzer, the lodge's manager and Alex Oberholtzer's wife, that was my plan.

"You know what I love about that?" she said. "The story just keeps going." @

releasing a rainbow trout near Brooks Falls. Opposite: Kingman

Dock boss Cooper,

a golden retriever;

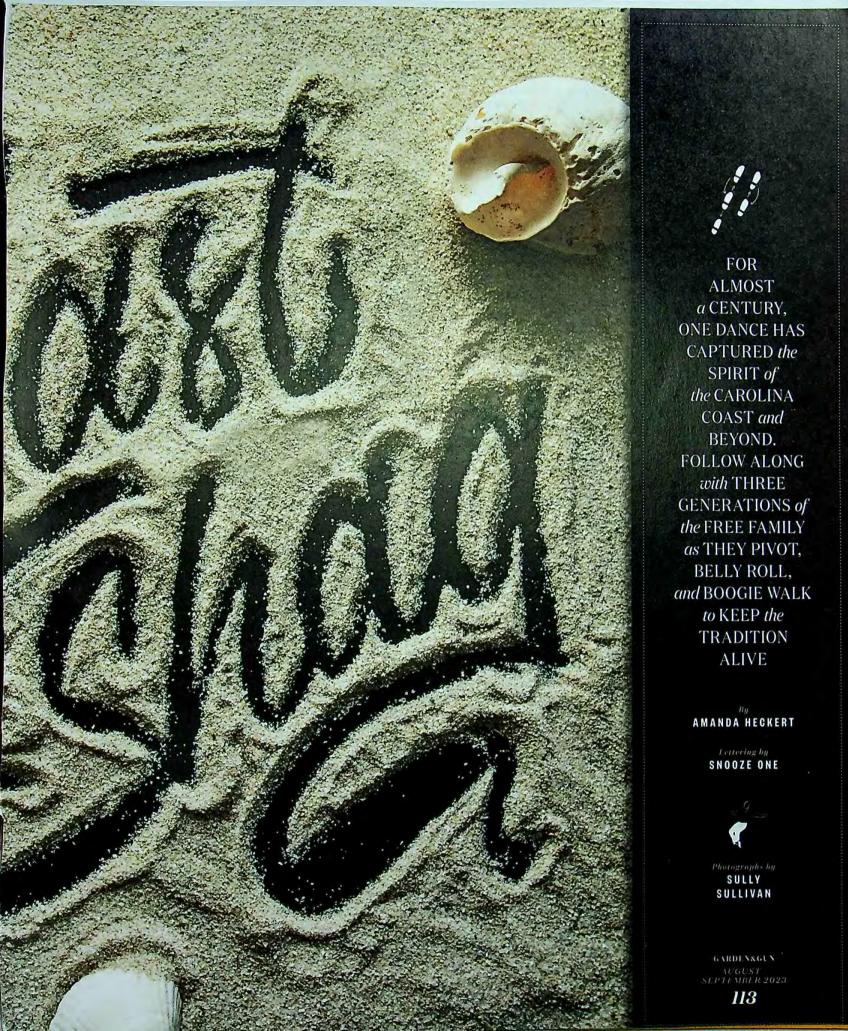
(left) and the author take a breather by the floatplane.













It's a Tuesday night in September, and the North Myrtle Beach shag club Fat Harold's teems with leather-tanned men and dyed-blonde women reliving the time of their lives on the dance floor. Mott Free spots Kaleb Brown, a friend of her grandson Grayson's. Kaleb and Grayson competed together on the Junior Shag Dance Team, traveling from Australia to Paris to California to spread the gospel of the shag, the state dance of the Carolinas. He's here tonight on leave from the Navy, and soon asks Mott to dance.

Mott, who is eighty-two, looks as though she could be Kaleb's mother rather than his "Nanny," as her grandchildren call her. She wears her hair in a stylish honey bob, along with gold hoop earrings, a loose white button-down, and yellow floral pants, the billowy kind favored by female shaggers for the ripples the dance induces.

A Rock-Ola jukebox glows in the corner, but the music comes courtesy of the Fat Harold's wood-paneled DJ booth, one of the most coveted spots for spinners on the coast. Mott and Kaleb hold right and left hands, respectively, and begin to shag to Frank Sinatra's "Fly Me to the Moon," smoothly accordioning together, oneand-two, pause, three-and-four, and then rocking back and forward on the five and six counts to starting position.

That's what's called the "basic," but these are professionalsthe Beach Shaggers National Hall of Fame, headquartered in North Myrtle, inducted Mott in 2000. Unlike most partner dances, in the shag the lead does most of the fancy footwork, and Kaleb doesn't disappoint, boogie walking and pivoting with Mott, "the prettiest move," in her opinion.

This crowd is nothing, Mott says. As the younger set gets off of work and out of school on Friday, they will make their way here to the Grand Strand region of the Carolina coastline for what remains of SOS, a ten-day get-together put on by the Society of Stranders every fall and spring that draws more than ten thousand shaggers for club hopping, block parties, workshops, and concerts by beach-music bands that have been crooning since the fifties and sixties-the Embers, the Swingin' Medallions, the Catalinas, Band of Oz.

Still, the hordes have undeniably gotten older, their hair thinner, grayer. Mott walks to the Harold's back room, with its smaller dance floor. There, plaques honor the Keepers of the Dance, a group the Hall of Fame started in 1998 to help counter that trend by honoring young people keeping the shag alive.

Mott points to a photo of a handsome teen with a swoosh of sandy hair: "Here's Matt." The Keepers tapped Matt-the youngest of Mott and her late husband Bobby's three sons, and Grayson's father-in 2001. As a Bass Weejun-loafered wunderkind, Matt competed on the junior shag circuit in the eighties, winning a record forty-three contests in a row, his plaque notes, as well as two junior national championships.

Matt and his generation learned to shag from their parents, a secondhand love; by that time, the dance's popularity since its postwar advent along Carolina shores had faded like a suntan in



Matt Free, his mother, Mott, and his son, Grayson, outside of Fat Harold's Beach Club in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

winter. But to the original shaggers, the dance still sparks a Pavlovian pleasure-the euphoria of youth, of newfound freedom, of dancing the night away at the ocean's edge, the moon the beachfront bacchanalia's only spotlight.

"It was a lifestyle," Norfleet Jones, one of the old-timers, explains. "It covered not only your three minutes on the floor, but it covered friends, attitude." Hints of that joie de vivre remain. You can see it when Grayson, a recent graduate of the Citadel military college in Charleston and one of the smoothest Gen Z shaggers, steps out onto the floor and boogies with abandon in his father's actual footsteps—he picks up Matt's moves by watching videos Bobby once made on a hulking camcorder.

As Mott leaves Fat Harold's, shaggers spill out of the open-air OD Pavilion, and a band plays in the Spanish Galleon club's parking lot. "Now that it's SOS, all these places are catering to shaggers," Mott explains as she crosses Main Street to Duck's Night Life, but Harold's is North Myrtle's only surviving full-time club. On this evening, though, pilgrims from as far as California shag under blue lights at Duck's, and Mott perches at a high-top with friends until an older gentleman asks her to dance. The Frees have a rule: It's rude to say no. Plus, Mott says, "somebody else who can dance might be looking and say, Well, she won't dance with him, she might not dance with me!" And with that, out she goes.

It's getting late but no one seems to flag. In North Myrtle, eternal youth beckons not in a fountain, but on these dance floors. Mott and other shaggers retire here to do just this. Still, there's real worry among her generation: What happens to this indigenous dance of the Carolinas when those who first put Weejuns to wood finally pass?

"Just like the tango, it's not going away," Mott says. "But the way we know it is going away."



o understand what Mott means, you need a little history. But if anyone tries to tell you they know the one true story of how the shag and its eyebrowraising name came to be, they are at the least misinformed. As Mott says, "You could ask a hundred

people and get a hundred different answers."

Most agree, though, that the shag-or what many simply called "fast dancing"-sprang from the big-band swing moves of the thirties and forties, slowed to the cadence of the Carolinas. The humorist Lewis Grizzard described it as "doing the jitter bug on Valium." Former Broadway dancer Stanley Catron, who landed the cover of Life in 1943 doing the Lindy Hop, once quipped, "Old Lindy people never die, they just do the shag." Famed instructor Arthur Murray taught a version, later known as the "collegiate shag," that looked more like the Jazz Age's Charleston.

All of those dances—including the Carolina shag—owe their flair to the influence of Black dancers and musicians. At the Big Apple in Columbia, South Carolina, where the Big Apple swing dance began, white teens would watch the Black dancers from the balcony. Mott recalls doing the same at the old County Hall in Charleston, where she saw Jackie Wilson perform.

Crossing that divide could come at a price. Myrtle Beach shaggers picked up moves at Charlie's Place, a "Chitlin Circuit" club on the Hill, a Black neighborhood not a mile from the Pavilion. There, everyone danced together, regardless of race. "We hugged each other's neck," recalled Leon Williams, an inaugural Hall of Famer, in Frank Beacham's book Whitewash: A Southern Journey through Music, Mayhem & Murder. "If you had been at the beach in that period of time, you'd thought segregation didn't exist." Harry Driver, another Hall of Famer, credited with perfecting the pivot, visited the juke joint so often that owner Charlie Fitzgerald, a stripedsuited New York dandy, didn't make him pay a cover. "We emulated what they did," Driver told Beacham. "Everybody claims to have started the shag. Nobody started it. It evolved from one dance to another in a big melting pot."

In the summer of 1950, the racial mingling inflamed the Ku Klux Klan. They paraded in convertibles in their white sheets through Myrtle Beach to Charlie's Place to threaten Fitzgerald, who refused to back down. About sixty of them returned that night and unloaded more than five hundred rounds of ammunition into the building and kidnapped Fitzgerald, whom they thrashed with a bullwhip.

Fitzgerald reopened Charlie's but died a few years later, his club eventually following him-but not his legacy. Charlie's regular "Big George" Lineberry, another Hall of Famer, went into the business of filling jukeboxes up and down the coast with 45s featuring the rhythm and blues he had heard there, "race music" then largely banned from white radio. The only way to hear what then came to be called "beach music" was to head to spots like Atlantic Beach's Idle Hour, North Myrtle's Pad, or Pawleys Island's pavilion.

Much of that vinyl came from Randy's Record Shop, a mailorder outfit that advertised on Nashville's WLAC, which broadcast news and pop clear down to the Caribbean-until nightfall. Then on came the likes of Duke Ellington, Big Joe Turner, B. B. King, and Etta James. In her hometown of Bamberg, in the South Carolina Lowcountry, young Martha "Mott" Brabham stayed up late to listen to WCKY, which did the same. "I have always been a rhythm and blues girl," Mott says. She learned to shag by watching her older sisters, Barbara and Rose, tagging along as early as ten as they danced to Black bands that played at the Folly Beach pier every weekend. "There was no such thing as lessons back then," Mott says.

Instead, anywhere with a Wurlitzer became a de facto dance

studio. High school cafeterias had jukeboxes. Municipal swimming pools did, too. American Legion outposts, resorts in places like North Carolina's White Lake, and open-air pavilions that clung to the sand from Virginia Beach to Edisto racked up quarters. "The only competition there was, was with yourself," recalls Norfleet Jones, a Raleigh native and Hall of Famer who became so enamored watching shaggers at Atlantic Beach, North Carolina, in 1955 that he didn't go back home that summer, staying instead to study the dancers. "The greatest prize you could win was clearing the dance floor."

After scoping out the best, a tenderfoot would return home, loop a towel or necktie or pantyhose to a doorknob or bedpost, and hold onto the other end to practice until they had the belly roll or sugarfoot down pat. Mott often emulated Charleston shagger Jean Rogers, a dance instructor who later opened a beloved shag club called J.B. Pivots. "Everyone wanted to dance like Jean," Mott recalls.

Each region put its own accent on the shag. Lowcountry dancers prized smoothness, like gliding over eggshells. The first time Mott witnessed showier dancers from Myrtle Beach, she joked they moved like they had "the rickets." To polish her own style, Mott sweet-talked friends into hauling her to shindigs two hours away at Isle of Palms and Folly, shagging holes in her slippers by day and sleeping in cars by night.

In 1958, at a weekly dance held at a Jaycee hut, one great dancer in particular caught seventeen-year-old Mott's eye: a "little blondhaired boy" from Cottageville, wearing draped peg pants and a jaunty felt hat. "I remember exactly where I was when Bobby came over and asked me to dance," she says. Mott's longtime boyfriend walked up in time to hear the request, and stormed out to the car. Mott eventually followed her boyfriend outside-but not before she danced with Bobby Free.

"Iended up marrying a man who loved to do what I did," she says now, choking up. "It may sound crazy—how in the world do you build a marriage on dancing? Shagging gets into your emotions."



or Matt Free, one of the best shaggers of his generation, his love of the dance ignited the night in 1980 he sneaked into his parents' bedroom in Cottageville. There, his father, Bobby, kept his and Mott's carton of vinyl. Ruth Brown's Rock & Roll. Wilson Pickett's It's Too Late. Esther Phillips's What a Diff'rence a Day

Makes. He turned on the record player and slipped the 1957 hit "Think" by the "5" Royales onto the spindle.

By then, the rock and roll of the sixties and seventies had twisted and frugged and hippie-twirled all over partner dancing until disco dawned, and now Blondie's "Call Me" topped the charts. Even so, eight-year-old Matt couldn't resist his parents' old rhythm and blues-though the fragile vinyl was off-limits. When Mott walked in on him, he knew he was in trouble. But Mott had another idea. "Do you want to learn how to shag?"

After Mott and Bobby had exchanged vows in 1960, they remained faithful to dancing. Weekly date nights to the Five O'Clock Club, in Charleston. The Elks Club in Walterboro. The Ramada Inn, in Santee. As Mott cradled their son Richard, then Robbie, and, finally, Matt in her arm, she held onto the kitchen counter with the other hand and shagged. Just a few minutes into her lesson with Matt, Mott ran into the living room, beside herself. "Bobby, Bobby! Matt can dance."

As it happens, that same year, former Ocean Drive lifeguard Gene "Swink" Laughter decided to stage a reunion with his fellow "shag hounds." He spent "hours and hours on long distance trying to find old beach bums," he recalled for the shag exhibit at the North Myrtle Beach Area Historical Museum. He also tossed out a message in a bottle coded with words and names only shaggers would recognize: SOS. Reward for delivery. Please see that this gets to Captain Earl Bostic of the USS Flamingo in the Port of Charlestowne. Raven is rocking off the Carolina Banks. Migration is under way. Dueat Oak Tree September 11th. Signed, James Ricks, Captain, USS Raven, 14 June 1897. After the antique glassware washed up at Myrtle Beach, the yellowed missive made headlines from Los Angeles to New York. (Naturally, a Sumter, South Carolina, radio personality beat experts at the Naval Institute and the Smithsonian in unraveling the prank.)

At that first gathering of the newly dubbed Society of Stranders, Laughter expected five hundred or so pals might join him at their North Myrtle stomping grounds. Instead, thousands showed up, eager to put leather-soled loafers to warped floorboards. As Laughter wrote in an editorial afterward, "the Grand Strand was our true alma mater."

Back in the Lowcountry, in Walterboro, where the Frees had moved, word got around that Matt could shag. A local couple asked Mott and Bobby to instruct their children, too. Mott decided to invite all the children at Matt's school. "I had to figure out, how do you *teach* this thing I've been doing my whole life?" The synagogue in town offered up space, and a hundred kids, from first grade through twelfth, came. One girl, a former gymnast named Leslie Williamson, showed promise. Bobby knew: If Matt started competing, Leslie would make a great partner.

Thanks to the now-annual SOS, shagging had resurged, with

North Myrtle and the dance floors of Ocean Drive at its heart; in 1982, "the first time I ever came to SOS," Mott recalls, "I couldn't believe it—I'd never been in a club where you had to turn sideways." And "beach music" came to denote not just old-school R&B, but also shag-friendly songs with lyrics soaked in the coconut scent of suntan oil: "Ms. Grace," by the Tymes, "I Love Beach Music," by the Embers, "Sixty Minute Man," by the Dominoes, "Under the Boardwalk," by the Drifters, "Be Young, Be Foolish, Be Happy," by the Tams, "Summertime's Calling Me," by the Catalinas. As General Johnson, the Chairmen of the Board front man, once said of beach music, "If I write a song down here, it'll last for fifty years. Anywhere else the lifespan of a song is six months."

Shag societies and clubs popped up across the Carolinas—from Irmo, South Carolina's Weejuns, to Groucho's in Charlotte—and beyond: Atlanta, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Memphis. Lessons and contests within these groups heated up with the formation of the Shag Preservation Association, which standardized judging, and later, the Competitive Shaggers Association. With that progression came the rise of "mirror steps"—choreography in which a couple reflects each other's moves—and more flamboyant footwork.

Soon Mott and Bobby were shuttling Matt and Leslie each weekend to a contest, Matt in his tailor-made "boogie britches" and Leslie in pedal pushers. Matt began concocting new steps—the "dead leg," for instance, in which he would swing his leg as though the weight of it were freed from his body—and he and Leslie dominated, taking the top spot at just about every junior competition

Memorabilia crowds the walls at Fat Harold's, including photographs of yesteryear's shaggers.



they entered, including the National Shag Dance Championships, freshly dreamed up by instructor Barry Thigpen, in 1985 and 1986.

In between, Mott worked at a bank and Bobby ran his own security company, and taught "like crazy every night," she says, not only children but adults, too: The Frees answered calls for lessons from Georgetown to Savannah. Eventually, they opened up a shag club for kids in Walterboro called Annie's, where Matt and his friends DJed for the small fry.

Across the country, Robin Swicord, then a budding Hollywood screenwriter, was working on a film featuring four teen girls who go to Myrtle Beach "to meet boys" and to discover themselves-and to dance the shag. While Swicord hadn't heard about the shag's revival, her mother had been a champion dancer in her hometown of Columbia and spent summers at Myrtle. "My mother would shag all the time," Swicord says. "If the radio was on, she'd grab your hand."

A set of Brits "who thought it would be a finger in the eye of the state," Swicord explains, "if there was a big marquee that said Shag"-a U.K. euphemism for sex-financed the indie, and the starlets Bridget Fonda, Page Hannah, Phoebe Cates, and Annabeth Gish signed on. While scouting locations for the 1963-set film at Myrtle Beach, Shag producer Julia Chasman recalls being shocked to find "there was a whole ready-made world of people, including young people, who still did the dance and lived that fun life."

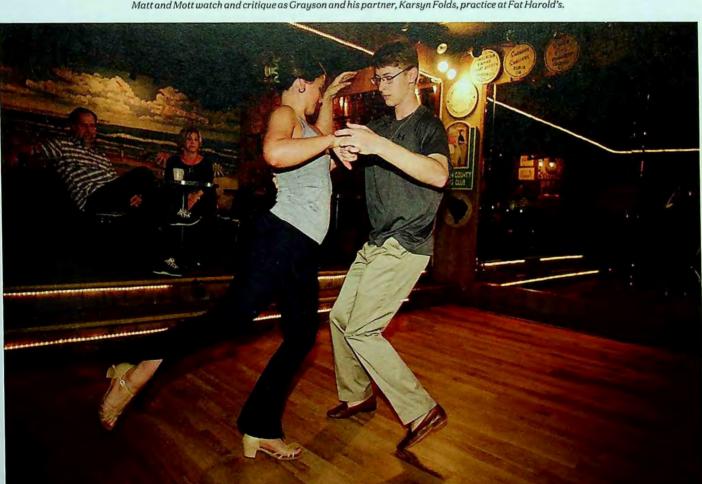
Before the camera rolled, though, the actors needed to learn how to shag. When the film's choreographer, Kenny Ortega, asked to see the best local dancers, Barry Thigpen showed him footage of Matt Free. "He said, 'I need to meet this guy," Thigpen recalls. At that time, the summer of 1987, Matt was only fifteen, but he "could dance as well as anybody."

Thigpen and his wife, Pat, offered a pullout sofa to Matt, and he slept there during filming. "I'll never forget it," Matt says of teaching Ortega and the actors, and of appearing in Shag as a featured dancer. "It was probably a good thing I wasn't really starstruck." Gish, on the other hand, who played "Pudge," a shy teen who turned swaggering shagger by movie's end, may have been-by Matt.

"When Matt would step in to lead me," Gish recalls, "I became a better dancer. I was enamored by this teenage guy who could just whisk me around. It's like his feet were barely moving, but they were just doing all of these ridiculously intricate steps in loafers. I'm pretty sure I had a big crush on Matt Free."

Making Shag along the Grand Strand in fact became an "iconic summer" for Gish. "We were filming on the beach, we were immersed in the beach lifestyle," she explains. "I was also coming of age at the time, and I was also seeing this whole new world." In the end, that world didn't expand beyond the big screen; when Shag was released in 1989, the movie did modestly well, and eventually became a cult favorite. But the shag itself didn't take off. By that time, Matt had moved on, too, at least from competition.

Stopping had been a hard decision; his parents thrilled to watch him excel at a pastime they loved. But at an age when Mott and Bobby had been hitching rides to the beach and shagging for fun, their steps full of spontaneity and joy, Mattwas living a highly



Matt and Mott watch and critique as Grayson and his partner, Karsyn Folds, practice at Fat Harold's.

choreographed life. A new driver's license, and high school sportsbaseball, basketball, and the football team, where he starred as running back-called. "I had danced so much, seven or eight years straight, all over the place," he explains. "I felt a little burned out."

n the winter of his sophomore year at the Citadel, Grayson Free stood guard at one of the white wedding-cake barracks the cadets call home. Beneath his beanie, he wore a pair of illicit Air-Pods, and as "White Port & Lemon Juice" by the Bel-Aires boomed in his ears, he began to shag. "I didn't think anybody was looking," the lithe

blond says, but another cadet had wandered up. "What are you doing?" the cadet asked. "I'm just dancing, dude," Grayson replied.

Grayson, who is now twenty-two, has been just dancing since he was barely seven, when he and his father, Matt, were watching a shag contest at J.B. Pivots in Charleston. Matt noticed tiny Grayson tapping his foot to the music. "Grayson, you like that?" Matt asked. "Yes, sir," he replied, and so Matt took him outside to show him the steps. "In five minutes he got the basic, and then went in and danced with someone," says Matt, who immediately called his mother. "Mom, Grayson can dance, Grayson can dance!"

To Mott, history repeating felt bittersweet. "I wish Bobby could have seen," she says of her husband, also a Hall of Famer, who died in 2006 of prostate cancer. "Grayson is the easiest person to dance with. His granddaddy was like that. It's just like you have a feather on the other end of your arm."

Few Carolina children outside the shage cosystem get exposed to the dance in any formal way beyond the likes of cotillion. Grayson never took lessons, either, but his Nanny and Dad gave himplenty of advice. Soon he was taking his smooth style and knack for creating eye-catching moves-"the Chuck Berry," most notably, for which he plays his leg like a guitar-to competitions.

Each July, he would also spend a week at Junior SOS, a summer camp for shaggers under twenty-one that began in 1991. Since then, the program has played a pivotal part in recruiting young dancers. Between the kids and the adults who bring them, Junior SOS attracted more than a thousand people pre-pandemic; after skipping two years in the heat of COVID, attendance has dropped some 40 percent, says Garrett Humphries, the president of the Junior Shag Association, which puts it on.

Jackie McGee, one of shag's winningest competitors and biggest ambassadors over the last forty years with her husband and partner, Charlie Womble, is determined to boost those numbers. "I keep thinking this could all go away very easily," she says. "Seeing the age of the dancers, if we don't have people in their thirties, forties, and fifties, too, we're in trouble." She and Womble teach in-demand Monday night classes at Fat Harold's, but she's most ardent about Junior SOS.

"These kids—not texting, not being on their phones all the time they're out on the dance floor, dancing to every single record," Mc-Gee says. "I'm thinking, My goodness, these are your friends for the rest of your life and you don't know it yet. These will be the people, when you're fifty and sixty, that you're still talking to and socializing with. You'll still have that common bond."

That's certainly been true so far for Grayson. He met his best friends and dance partners there, including Kaylee Bravo, a twentythree-year-old who placed third with him at this year's freewheeling Keepers of the Dance competition in February, at Fat Harold's. She recalls loving to dance, too, with Matt, who would take vacation days from his job in IT sales to teach at Junior SOS. "He and Grayson have such a unique style," Bravo says, "and whenever me and Grayson dance, you hear him in the background screaming the loudest for his son."

Even so, when Grayson began to burn out and turned to soccer and skateboarding instead, Matt understood all too well. Grayson still showed up for Junior SOS, though, and the dancers there eventually lured him back to competition, and onto the Junior Shag Dance team-and his skills would come in handy at the Citadel. He easily won a spot on the school's elite Summerall Guards; he wears the patch for the precision drill team on his blue drab field jacket, near the sleeve that bears his class numeral, 23, and the "legacy patch" bearing that of his father's Citadel graduation year-94. "I was like, dude, all it is, is counts," he recalls. "I've been learning counts my entire life."

Shagging let him cut loose from that regimented day-to-day. He and his friends would rent a house at North Myrtle and dance into the wee hours as Mott and her peers once did. When he enters a contest these days, he does so to show off his moves. "He likes to dance better than his daddy liked to dance," Mott says.

But Grayson worries about the drop in junior-aged shaggers, too. "Back in the day, there were so many," he says. "I don't want my generation to be the reason it dies." He dreams of opening a shag club in Charleston. The bump and grind of today's style of dancing along King Street, where Grayson and his buddies hang out-"it's not as fun, you know?" he says. "It's different when you're

Dancers at March's National Shag Dance Championships, including, far left, Grayson Free and Karsyn Folds.







holding hands and you're connecting with somebody. I want people to experience the shag the way I have."



he first night of March's National Shag Dance Championships, Grayson and his partner, Karsyn Folds-the grandchild of another Hall of Famertear up the floor to the Penguins' "Baby Let's Make Some Love" as the audience, packed to standing-

room-only at the Spanish Galleon, whoops and yells.

The Galleon, a pink-and-teal fever dream with dance cages and disco balls, connects to the Ocean Drive Beach and Golf Resort. Known as the OD, the hotel belongs to former county councilman Harold Worley, who also owns Fat Harold's-he took over just before the original owner, the much beloved, Harry Caray-beframed Harold Bessent, died in 2015. Out-of-towners stay there for North Myrtle's myriad shagging events, many of which raise money for scholarships, another lure for young shaggers; these championships alone have awarded more than \$300,000 to students in the past quarter century.

During the three-day contest, the OD swims with signs of practice: the scuffle of loafers to Barbara Lewis's "Hello, Stranger" seeps under a door on the eighth floor. In the lobby, a father counts steps for two shaggers who barely reach his waist. Another couple rehearses on the mezzanine, below the plaques telling the stories of Hall of Famers going back to the first class of 1983.

Coming together for the sake of the dance now means even more to the Frees; Matt, who is fifty-one, has moved from Charleston to Montana with his second wife, Andé, and their children. On Friday morning, Mott's son Robbie cooks a big brunch of shrimp and grits at her house for everyone; Grayson straggles in after a late night out, and after a cup of coffee, he and Matt goof around practicing one of his dad's old steps in socked feet; Grayson wants to slip it into the dance he and Folds will do that night to Ben E. King's jazzy "Moon River."

Later, at Fat Harold's, Mott and Matt sit at a cocktail table as Grayson and Folds run through the choreography. When they finish, mother and son consult. "So, that second little lean?" Matt asks. "How do y'all feel about that one?" A tweak here, a tinker there. They rehearse again and Matt claps. "So much better."

Lulu Quick-Rigsby, the longtime manager at Fat Harold's, looks on as the two take another spin in front of the mirrors. She started working off and on for Bessent, "the Fat Man," in 1980; she and Worley sat by his bedside as he ailed, and "promised him we'd keep

his legacy going as long as our health would let us." Quick-Rigsby, though, is tired. "I'm sixty-eight, and I would love to retire," she says as she sits in her office, cluttered with photos and plaques and invoices and DJ schedules. "But you got thirty, forty, fifty thousand people depending on you to keep a place open so they can have somewhere to go. It's going to be a harsh reality one day." The Frees, though, exemplify the best of what shagging can mean, she says, why it and the tight-knit community it spawned have survived nearlyahundred years—and why she's sticking around. "Love," she says. "That's the common denominator for everything around here."

That, and Fat Harold's, and North Myrtle Beach itself. "I've traveled in all the dance worlds," Jackie McGee elaborates, "country, ballroom, swing. None of them have what we have. They're a hundred times bigger, but they're scattered. The thing that has kept us the closest is that we have a central place."

The Saturday of finals, Grayson wears a pendant of gold shagging loafers, one that once belonged to Bobby. He and Folds dance with such spirit that sweat drips into Grayson's eyes and he instinctively flings his glasses toward the judges' table, but to an untrained eye, it looks like yet another flourish to get the crowd going.

When Grayson competes, "it's the only time he gets nervous," Andésays, pointing to Matt, whose eyes are fixed on the dance floor, fists pumping. Mott can barely stand to watch. They all hug and high-five Grayson when he comes off the floor. Matt says the weekend has given him the bug: "Momand I are going to dance next year."

The ties the shag tightens in other families, too, surface as the emcee begins to call out winners and runners-up with surnames that echo across divisions and generations: Brown, Sellers, Batten, West. But before she can finish, the lights flicker, and the crowd gasps. Then they snuff out completely.

This cut to black-one might be forgiven for wondering if it's some cosmic metaphor for the shag and its future. Instead of panicking, though, the crowd starts to titter. A shagger shimmies up a cage, and yells, "Is there any more tequila?" And one by one, young and old get out their phones, and turn on their flashlights.

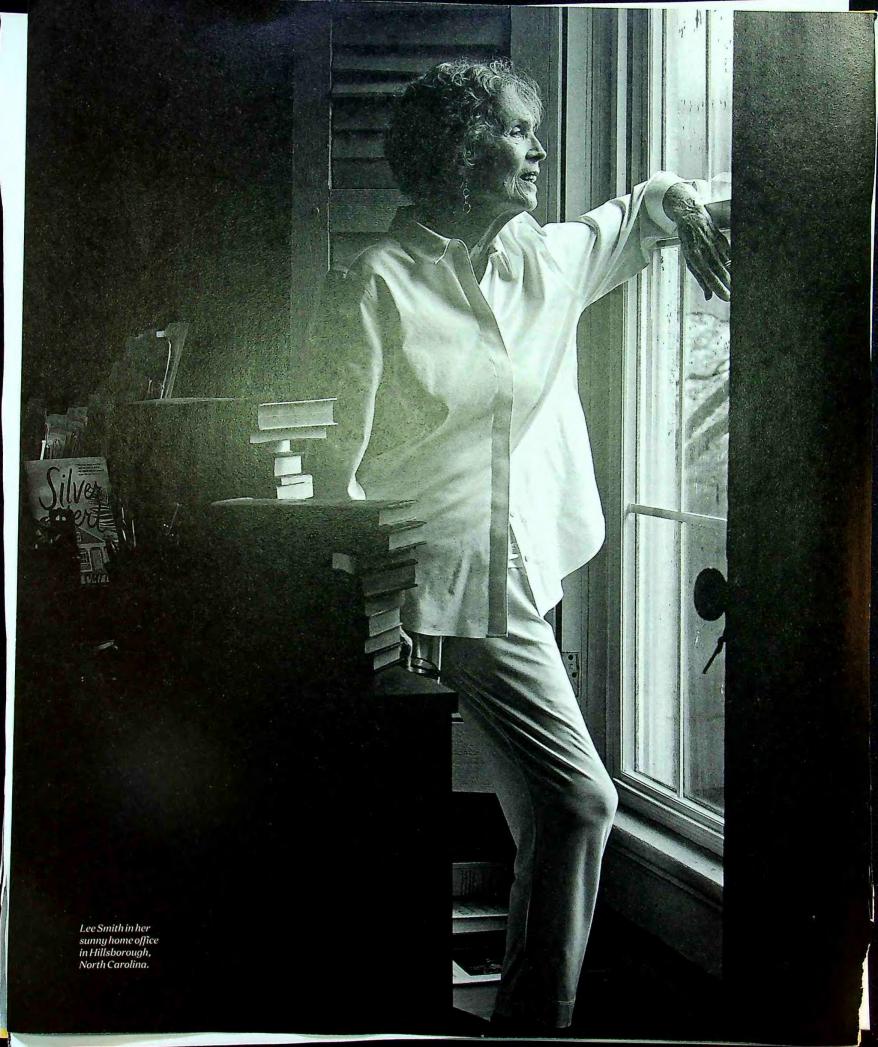
The dance floor emerges from the dimness, and the rest of the champions are announced. Grayson and Folds, two of the youngest in the professional category, are happy to snag third. And even as the crowd begins to help one another up the steps to leave, no one seems fussed. It's just another memory-making moonlit night on the Grand Strand.

"Hey," someone shouts across the darkness. "Y'all wanna go to Fat Harold's?" @









BOLLONG AND GENEROUS SPIRIT OF LEE SMITH Across her fifteen novels—among them Appalachian classics and a recent road trip

tale set partially in the Florida Keys—no one has tapped into Southern truths quite like the Virginia-raised author. Just ask the legion of writers who praise her for guiding their own stories

By SILAS HOUSE

Photographs by GATELY WILLIAMS

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GARDENAGUN
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LEE SMITH GLIDES THROUGH THE POURING

her distinctive laugh curling out behind her. Once she reaches the back stoop of

her antebellum house in downtown Hillsborough, North Carolina, she shakes a spray of droplets from her hair and wipes water from her face. "Oh, Lord, that was magic!" she will recall later, even though now she is drenched by the cold cloudburst that is still pummeling the ground. I've long noticed how she seems to find the positive in every situation. I see joy in her vivid blue eyes. There's a hint of mischief in them, and in that smile that overtakes her whole face. She's known for her kindness, but also for her tenacity. She punctuates the occasional curse word she drops with a gleeful brow lift that widens her eyes and acknowledges her naughtiness. She's petite and birdlike in her movements but large in presence; when she enters a room, everyone knows it.

In the world of Southern literature, Lee Smith's big personality and her melodious laugh are the stuff of legend. Smith, who grew up in the little Appalachian town of Grundy, Virginia, is one of the most beloved and acclaimed writers of her time. Along with pioneers such as Bobbie Ann Mason, Lisa Alther, and Alice Walker, she was part of the "New South" literary movement of the 1980s that changed American literature, depicting a South that was more Hardee's and Kmartthan it was magnolias and general stores, more women's issues and civil rights than good old boys and cotillions.

Smith published her first novel, *The Last Day the Dogbushes Bloomed*, in 1968, only a year after she graduated from Hollins College (now University) in Virginia. She studied there alongside another future legend, Annie Dillard, with whom she once served as a go-go dancer for an all-girl rock band called the Virginia Woolfs. Since then, Smith has raised two children, taught at high schools and universities, and published fourteen more novels, four short-story collections, and a memoir. Along the way she's collected two O. Henry Awards, the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award for Fiction, and the Southern Book Critics Circle Award, and cracked the bestseller lists. This past spring, before her fifteenth novel, *Silver Alert*, came out, her friend Dolly Parton read it and wrote in a letter to her: "It's very different and it's very special and it's very good! I loved it."

Smith has also mentored, guided, and believed in many of the South's next generation of writers, including me.

"I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT MY OWN AGE," SMITH SAYS as she puts out breakfast—sweet rolls, quiche, and strong coffee—after drying off. She will turn seventy-nine in November, and she recently faced a string of age-appropriate ailments that have made her think more about aging than ever before. "You know, no matter how healthy you are, health does become something you have to come to terms with. That's one thing I've always done with my writing, I think—used it as a way to come to terms with issues that I may be having myself."

Silver Alert came into being about six years ago during a Florida Keys jaunt along Route 1 with her husband, the writer Hal Crowther. Driving home, they encountered a highway sign proclaiming a Silver Alert—a public notification about a missing senior citizen. "It had the make and model of the car. It gave the license

number, and it had a number to call," Smith says, drawing her hand across the air to conjure the image. As they drove, the couple started making up the story, rooting for an imaginary old man to make his escape. "We're just saying, 'You go!' and by now...we've made up that he's got a passenger with him. The story just sort of started happening in my head."

Silver Alert centers on Herb, an eighty-three-year-old man who escapes Key West for a joyride after discovering the car keys his children had taken from him. "Ilove him because he's not going quietly or gracefully into that good night," Smith says. "He is kicking and screaming and acting awful and acting out... I think most of us are too polite. We think old people should just calm down and go sit in the corner and he's just, 'What the hell?"

Herb's passenger, Dee Dee, a mysterious manicurist from Appalachia, is on the run from true evil. Smith studied manicure techniques to accurately portray Dee Dee's work. "I have a real good friend who is a young manicurist," Smith says. "She taught me a lot...Ilearned how to do it. It's an art. I mean, it's a real art." The story unfolds from their two wildly different viewpoints: Herb's sections examine aging, while the chapters focusing on Dee Dee tackle sex trafficking, both issues that have become close to Smith's heart.

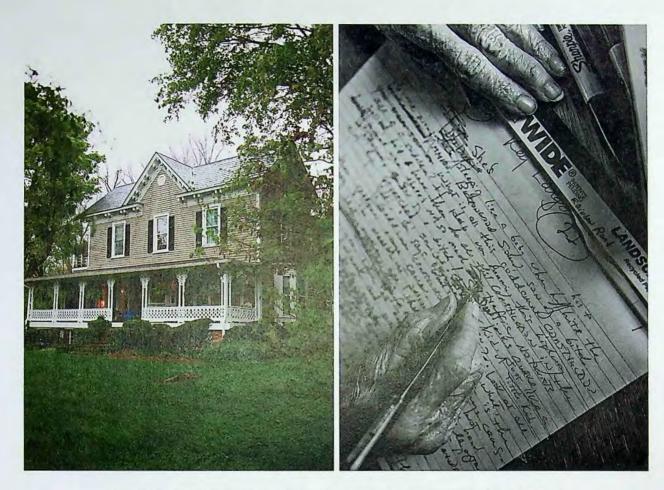
Smith first learned about the perils of sex trafficking through Thistle Farms in Nashville, which provides support and housing for female survivors of trafficking, prostitution, and addiction. She performed alongside friends Matraca Berg, Marshall Chapman, and Jill McCorkle in their music-and-monologues show called *Good Ol' Girls* as a fundraiser there, and she's also worked with similar groups in North Carolina and Maine, where she and Crowther spend their summers.

Silver Alert reads a bit like an unintentional companion piece to Smith's 2020 novella Blue Marlin, which was inspired by her family's real-life stay in Key West when she was a child. Both her parents suffered from depression, and a psychiatrist suggested they go to the island for "a geographical cure for their marriage," she says. They stayed three months, and Smith went to school there. "Cuban girls pierced my ears," she remembers. "In church, they thought it was a sin!" In both books, young Appalachian women find healing in Key West. "Ithink it's because it's divorced from the mainland," she explains. "It's America, but it's not. It's just a place where you can be who you really are—or who you might really want to be that you might not even know until you get there." She leans forward over the kitchen table, hands floating before her. "And it just has always had that effect on me. The quality of the light, the immense sky...So here I am, back on Route I again."

SMITH WAS RAISED IN GRUNDY, A COAL-MINING MOUNtain town in Southwest Virginia, a place very different from Key West or North Carolina's Research Triangle, where she has lived most of her life. But she says it's no surprise that an Appalachian character has shown up in the new novel.

"Seems like whatever I'm writing, somebody will be Appalachian," she says as she climbs the stairs to her office, where shelves overflow with books and framed pictures of her children, grand-children, and many writing friends. She turns reverent, struck by another thought about back home. "When you're from Appalachia, it never leaves you. It just imprints real hard. And I mean, I'm glad it does. But it really does."

Although she moved away from the region about sixty years ago, she still pines for it. In her 2016 memoir, *Dimestore*, she writes about her complex love for Grundy; like many rural Americans, she couldn't wait to leave but then found the place never left her. In one particularly moving scene, she relates a memory from when she was a teenager at a drive-in movie where the Stanley Brothers—



From left: Smith's historic home in downtown Hillsborough; she often writes and revises her work by hand.

before they were famous-played a set during intermission atop the concession stand roof:

Old people were clogging on the patch of concrete in front of the window where you bought your Cokes and popcorn; little kids were swinging on the iron-pipe swing set. Whole families ate fried chicken and deviled eggs they'd brought from home, sitting on quilts on the grass. My boyfriend reached over and squeezed my sweaty hand. The Stanley Brothers' nasal voices rose higher than the gathering mist, higher than the lightning bugs that rose from the trees along the river as night came on.

In one short passage, she manages to conjure Appalachia's best parts: the community feeling, the music, the safety of familiarity, good food, and the markers of place-mist, lightning bugs, the river-we can never forget. The scene is also quintessential Lee Smith in that it is simultaneously funny, moving, and a remarkable conjuring of place and time.

"I'm homesick all the time," she says. "I just get so excited...when I get to go to Grundy." Last year I was with her on a return visit for the unveiling of a huge new sign declaring it as the HOMETOWN OF AUTHOR LEE SMITH. The local library hosted a two-day celebration featuring a church homecoming-style supper with casseroles, ham, chicken and dumplings, various salads, and a dessert table overflowing with homemade cakes and pies at the First Presbyteri-

an Church fellowship hall; a lengthy luncheon that ended with tributes from writers including Carter Sickels, Heather Frese, and me; as well as a cocktail party hosted by a childhood friend where stories of Smith's teenage adventures had us laughing far into the night.

She's kept Appalachia alive in her large home in the writers' enclave of Hillsborough, too. "Practically everything in this house came from my parents' house in Grundy," Smith says of the antique furniture that surrounds her. "I always use one of Mama's mixing bowls whenever I'm making biscuits or bread or a cake. I still have her recipe box right here." There are also hand-stitched quilts, paintings of fiddlers, and stacks of CDs in the kitchen, mostly featuring her homeland's music.

Matraca Berg, who has written country music classics such as "Strawberry Wine" and "You and Tequila," says Smith's 1988 novel Fair and Tender Ladies, set in the Blue Ridge Mountains, was a life changer for her. "I knew [the narrator] Ivy's voice right away," she told me recently. "So much like my granny who was born deep in the mountains with just elementary education. It startled and excited me because I thought great Southern literature was mainly set in the Deep South. It was a revelation. Lee has such a heartbreakingly beautiful, lyrical quality with her words. I read everything of hers."

Tayari Jones, the author of such best-selling books as An American Marriage whose work Smith championed early on, says that one of Smith's greatest strengths is that she is "an unapologetically regional writer. This is not to say that her work is only of interest to those who hail from Appalachia. I mean this to say that she represents and embodies her home in her art. She presents the folks around whom she grew up without sentimentality and without explanation to the rest of the world." Jones compares Smith's ear for the rhythms of speech to Zora Neale Hurston's. "This magic comes about when three rare circumstances occur simultaneously—an artist possessing a staggering talent also demonstrates incredible discipline and rigor while honoring, loving, and respecting the culture that shaped her."

Smith's insistence on keeping her focus regional may have kept her from becoming a larger name internationally, but she says she never worried about that: "I've never paid very much attention to my career. I've just been writing."

WHEN I WAS TWENTY-FOUR, SMITH CAME TO DO A READing at a library near my hometown of Corbin, Kentucky. I hovered at the end of her signing line to tell her how her work had transformed me as a writer and a person, mainly because she was the first writer to make me feel like I had seen my own people in literature. Serendipitously, she had recently read my first published short story and remembered my name. This was enough to make her insist that I attend the Appalachian Writers' Workshop at Hindman Settlement School in Knott County, Kentucky, where she often taught. The school is a literary and literacy center for Appalachia, offering creative writing classes as well as adult education, GED services, and one of the most respected dyslexia programs in the country. I was working as a part-time mail carrier then, and I scraped together enough money to pay my tuition, but I didn't have enough for room and board. The director allowed me to set up a tent on the creek bank behind the school. Perhaps seeing my dedication to learning more about the craft caused Smith to pull me closer beneath her wing. Like the best teachers, she saw something in me that I couldn't yet see in myself. She offered to read my novel when I finished it.

That entire week felt like a dream to me, getting to sit on a porch and jaw with my literary hero not only about writing, but also about the similarities in how we grew up, the music we loved, our affection for dogs. I went home so energized that I lit into that first novel in a whole new way. Smith read it immediately and wrote me back a long letter full of praise, diplomatic criticism, and advice for making it better. Working with her and the other writers she introduced me to shaped my whole career, and she has never stopped encouraging and nurturing me, particularly in my most difficult times personally and professionally. I think of her as my literary mother and a constant comfort.

When I spoke to other writers about her, I found I was not alone in feeling this way. "I'm grateful to Lee for so many things: her craft, her kindness, her fabulous laugh," says the recent Pulitzer Prize winner Barbara Kingsolver. "For her confidence, writing Appalachian stories that showed me the way into my own place and people, when I was a young writer struggling to find self-respect. And then, as soon as I'd entered the canon of Appalachian writers, she generously praised me as a peer."

Wiley Cash, a three-time Southern Book Prize winner, says Smith is "the Dolly Parton of American literature. Her kindness, wit, and warmth make you want to be near her, but it all belies an intense intelligence and devotion to her craft."

Her two most recent editors say one of her greatest strengths is her determination to keep growing as a writer. "She was always open to suggestions, always willing to reconsider, and always ready with better remedies than what I suggested," says storied editor Shannon Ravenel, who worked with Smith on bestsellers such as The Last Girls and The Christmas Letters. Smith's current editor, Kathy Pories at Algonquin, agrees. "She is game to dive in. When

we were working on Silver Alert, we sat on her porch and as I talked, she diligently took notes, filling up pages of her legal pad, looking up often to say, 'Oh yes, I like that idea.' If I had to describe her in one word, or okay, let's make it three, I would say 'generosity of spirit.'"

Upon Silver Alert's release, Smith went on a short book tour with Daniel Wallace, the author of widely read books such as Big Fish who had just released his memoir, This Isn't Going to End Well. Wallace was a student of Smith's at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and remembers her class as formative, fun, and energetic. Smith recalls that the first day of class he showed up wearing "red tennis shoes, his mother's full-length mink coat, and some kind of hat." She throws her head back and laughs.

Wallace later tells me that when his first novel was being considered for publication, Smith wrote a letter to a publisher to explain why they should buy it, and they did. "She's the most generous writer on the planet," Wallace says. He's amazed to have been able to tour with her. "There are some dreams you don't dream, because they are outlandish even for a dream: Writer and mentor sharing a happy ending and happier because it's not an ending at all."

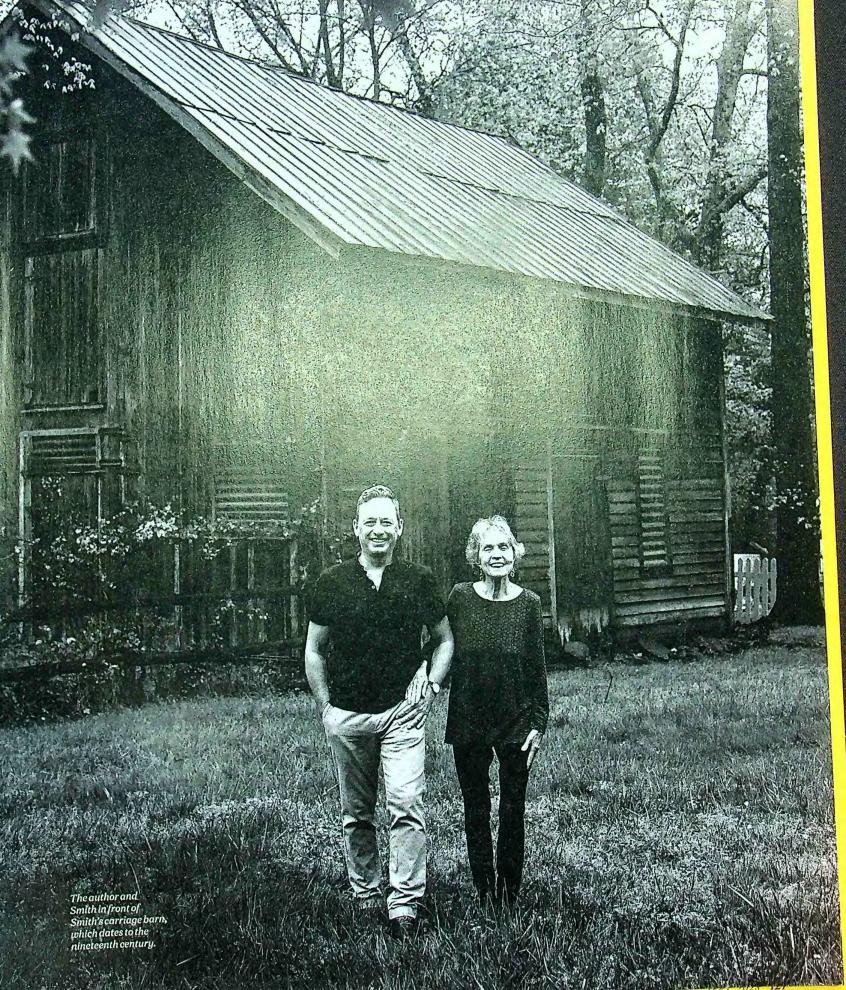
Smith waves off any suggestion that her support of other writers has been unusual. "I feel like it's a responsibility to help other people," she says. "I love to teach. You can help people, you can inspire them in certain ways, or you can help them improve what it is that they are writing. The teaching has been a great privilege for me." When I ask her how she can be repaid, she shrugs. "Just pass it on."

The rain has stopped now, and Smith is leaning in her long office window, bathed in the kind of golden light that only exists after a rainstorm. She looks down on her wild front yard, which she has not allowed to be mown because it is covered in buttercups. She says that when they all bloom out, she will invite the whole neighborhood over for cocktails so they can enjoy them, too. "We do it every year and have the best time."

Over the years Smith has often talked about having been "so wild" that her parents sent her off to boarding school. She has told the story many times of getting kicked out of the international travel program in college for "staying out all night in Paris." I ask her if she still feels wild, and mischief sparks in her eyes as she folds her hands before her. "Yeah." A mixture of slight embarrassment and happiness is alive on her face. "I do." Her eyes cast down onto the backs of her hands. "I think now my characters act that out. That's the great privilege of being a writer. When you get too old to do it yourself, your characters can do it."

A couple of hours after I leave for home, Smith calls me just as I reach the first rises of the Appalachian Mountains. She wants to make sure I'm driving safely as a ferocious storm lurches across the region. After we hang up, I fish around in the bag of food she packed for my ride: a can of Virginia peanuts, potato chips, a sleeve of saltines, a can of Vienna sausages, and dark chocolate truffles. I keep thinking about how good she has always been to me, and how she feels fortunate both to be a writer and to be part of other writers' lives. I return to the remarkable characters she has created—Ivy Rowe, Almarine Cantrell, Kate Malone, Crystal Spangler, Florida Grace Shepherd, Jenny Dale—and the scenes from her books that remain so clear in my mind, years after I read them.

I can see her in her office, the light streaming down as she goes right back to writing, just as she has always done. She's working on a novella right now, as well as shortstories. One piece, "The Cutter," centers on an Appalachian woman finding her own power for the first time. Smith is especially thankful these days that stories and characters have come to her so vividly for so long. "It was always... what I did to make sense of my life," she says. "It has kept life very interesting, because I think if you're listening out for stories, you will hear them. Stories just show up for me."



TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE FOR THE SOUTHERN SOUL

WEEKENDS

Top of the Morning

RISE LIKE A REGULAR FOR THESE LOCAL-FAVORITE BREAKFAST JOINTS

By Hanna Raskin



Top row: Majoria's Commerce in New Orleans; in Asheville, All Day Darling's cappuccina and shakshuka. Middle raw: A finishing drizzle over local greens at All Day Darling; the open-faced Commerce Breakfast Biscult topped with sunny-side-up eggs at Majoria's; All Day Darling morning brew. Bottom row: A welcoming smile at Joe's in Austin; a Majoria's Blaody Mary; gathering for breakfast in Asheville. Opposite: All Day Darling baker Ashley Cort.



breakfast as the most important meal of the day. Of course, the pros have glucose levels in mind when they advise against starting on an empty stomach. But an added benefit of seeking out a country ham biscuit, catfish Benedict, or eggs and rice is getting acquainted with the place that produced it. ¶ Restaurants

that specialize in breakfast crack open a window to their communities and give visiting eaters a chance to get to know the people who enliven them. A tasting menu restaurant might be trendy, but breakfast joints are the real deal for local flavor if you're visiting a new town-folks don't put on airs when they go out for breakfast. Get a taste of what the regulars come back for again and again at these seven early-bird restaurants across the South. Doctor's orders.



Clockwise from left: The egg biscuit at Majoria's; All Day Darling is ready to grind; Wendell T. and Adrena Jackson run Eggxactly in Memphis.

MOUNTAIN BOUNTY

ALL DAY DARLING

Asheville, North Carolina

As its name implies, the staffers at All Day Darling trot out classical pastry techniques each day from 7:00 a.m. all the way until 9:00 p.m. The bustling café in Asheville's historic Montford neighborhood is a reliable source of impossibly flaky croissants and airy profiteroles-at least for breakfasters who aren't distracted by the shakshuka or frittata, showcasing local greens.

Still, that baking rigor doesn't rule out earthier practices in line with Western North Carolina kitchen traditions, such as foraging. "We have a bunch of honeysuckle growing outside, and we might infuse that into pastry cream," says Ashley Cort, who leads the pastry program at the restaurant opened by chef Jacob Sessoms. In other words, All Day aims to both reflect and serve its surrounding area, whether that means a wake-up cup of tea



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sweetened with mountain honey or regular pizza nights. "We're very community oriented," Cort says. "We draw on a lot of love and support."

SECRET'S IN THE SAUCE

EGGXACTLY BREAKFAST & DELI

Memphis, Tennessee

2 | Even before Adrena and Wendell T. Jackson offered stacks of pancakes slathered with caramelized bananas Foster sauce, and even before they'd introduced breakfast fans to the signature hot thigh sauce that zips up Eggxactly's chicken and waffles, people from the neighborhood congregated at their place.

That's because the bungalow on Marlin Road, which started out as the couple's house, served as a barbershop and beauty parlor before Wendell (who had previously worked as a butcher) decided to dip back into the food world. It took the Jacksons three years to convert the building into a restaurant, which opened in 2019. "Memphis really didn't have a breakfast spot where people could commune together," says Wendell, who estimates most customers linger at their tables for about three hours. One popular conversation topic is that hot thigh sauce, which he blends from



seven different fruit juices and something spicy that he won't reveal. "It's hot, but it's not too hot where you can't stand it," he says. Savvy customers apply it to Egg-xactly's fried catfish.

MI CASA, SU CASA

JOE'S BAKERY & COFFEE SHOP

Austin, Texas

Austin has plenty of restaurants that cater to breakfasters seeking vegan migas, gluten-free tortillas, and morning Micheladas. Joe's Bakery & Coffee Shop is not one of them. "That's just not what we are," says Regina Estrada, who describes her family's homey spot as a time capsule. "We're happy that's how [other places] do it—that's the beauty of living in Austin—but our recipes call for certain ingredients."

Ingredients such as flour for the warm tortillas, which swaddle eggs scrambled with chicharrones softened in salsa, and tender pork for the carne guisada, plated with crisp bacon, beans, and fried potatoes. Yet while the Tejano and Motown classics on the jukebox may suggest otherwise, Estrada says that Joe's is open to change, solong as it's considerate of locals who've been customers for half a century. For example, Joe's dropped the listing for chorizo and eggs from its menu because hipsters complained the spicy sausage dish wasn't eggy enough. But as regulars know, the kitchen never stopped making it.

WHEELING & MEALING

MAJORIA'S COMMERCE RESTAURANT

New Orleans, Louisiana

Al Majoria's Commerce Restaurant's delivery fleet consists of a single armygreen Electra bicycle that longtime employee Ernest Brown pedals to offices across New Orleans' Central Business District. But if you get your Commerce Breakfast Biscuit brought to you, its jalapeño-and-sausage-flecked cheese sauce—applied so lavishly that the egg sandwich is offered in both full and half portions—won't be seasoned by the lively conversation of residents who've been filling Commerce's Formica seats since 1965. Staffed by servers who can toss a friendly greeting in your di-



rection without slowing down, the timeless diner is the ideal starting place for a busy day or one that follows an especially festive night. (Tip: hash browns embroidered with smoked sausage.)

For decades helmed by John "Chance" Majoria, Commerce throughout most of its history didn't make a play for French Quarter tourists on the other side of Canal Street. Then workplaces went dark during the pandemic, and Majoria's son, Brett, who has run the restaurant since just before his father's death in 2013, reasoned it couldn't hurt to start offering mimosas, Bellinis, Irish coffees, and oat milk macchiatos alongside the menu mainstays of fried egg po'boys, breakfast biscuits, and Cajun shrimp omelets. Turns out, New Orleanians like the new drinks, too.

PLANT POWERED

THE MANATEE CAFE

St. Augustine, Florida

5 | Just like the sea cows in the paintings that line the walls of this shotgun stripmall space, rendered cozy and cheery by the Manatee Cafe, many diners here are sworn herbivores. While the restaurant is not exclusively vegan, the sensitivity it has demonstrated on the dietary restriction









The timeless diner is the ideal starting place for a busy day or one that follows an especially festive night. (Tip: hash browns embroidered with smoked sausage)



front since its early-nineties juice bar days has made the Manatee a favorite of locals who prefer to eat plants.

Breakfast is arguably the easiest meal for omnivores to imagine replicating without animal products: They envision a burrito with hummus and sweet potatoes, or oatmeal crowned with fresh organic fruit. The Manatee serves those dishes, but long-time customers knowits kitchen is equally adept at sunrise classics that most vegan home cooks wouldn't dare attempt, such as French toast. Spelt flour bread, crisped at the edges, is an ideal canvas for maple syrup, walnuts, and bananas. Among the other celebrated dishes are scrambled tofu crowned with zesty salsa, and an omelet brimming with mushrooms and avocado.

SAVORING GRACE

MILLIE'S DINER

Richmond, Virginia

6 | First-time visitors to Millie's Diner, a name rarely mentioned in Richmond without "the classic" or "the iconic" preceding it, sometimes grouse that the menu skews too savory. After all, the restaurant since its 1989 opening has been best known for its "messes," or flavorful frittatas ornamented with sausage and veggies, and its

home fries, crusted in Indian spices and tossed with garlic. Amid so much umami, you can't blame a Belgian waffle habitué for feeling at sea.

Maybe regulars aren't squawking because they're reluctant to see weekend brunch lines grow any longer, but the Millie's menu indeed has a sweet spot. For a kick-start sugar fix, cast your eyes upon the cocktail list, headed by the Evil Keevil, a locally beloved rum punch. Millie's also devises seasonal drinks, such as spiked peanut butter hot chocolate in winter, and key lime pie martinis in the summertime. (Of course, there's always house-made Bloody Mary mix on hand for the pepper partisans.) With creativity and verve that transcend the retired diner that houses it, Millie's has left an impression well beyond the Tobacco Rowneighborhood it's always called home.

MEET & GREEK

THE WHITE HOUSE RESTAURANT

Atlanta, Georgia

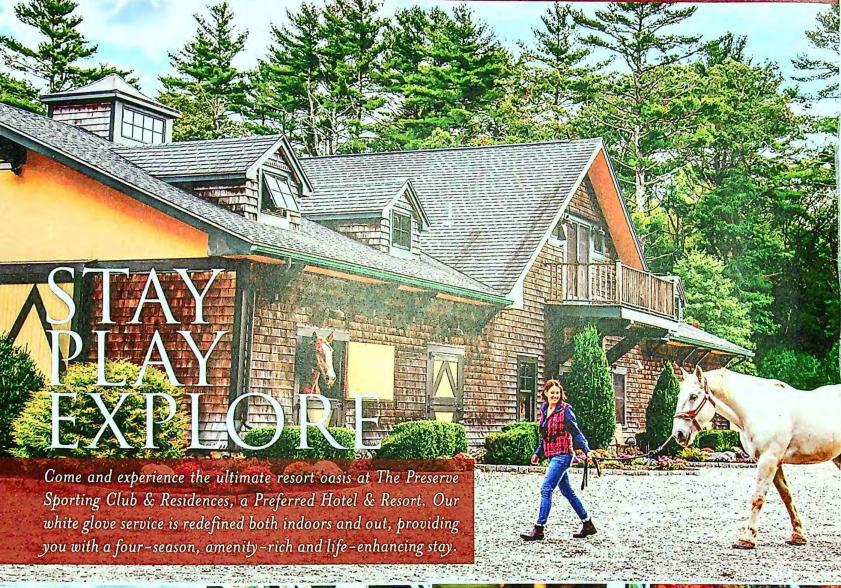
7 | The patrons most frequently associated with the White House Restaurant might be Buckhead's resident corporate executives, former elected officials, and

From far left: Virginia bacon stars in the BLT at Millie's in Richmond; fueling up at Majoria's; Joe's restaurateur Regina Estrada and family; the Majoria's egg po'boy.

socialites, but Rodney Mims Cook, Jr., became a regular of the seventy-five-year-old breakfast institution when he was just a kid taking clarinet lessons across the street. "I remember vividly walking there in the winter," Cook says. "The warmth of the place and the smell of cooking bacon were so embracing."

As the president of the National Monuments Foundation, Cook has devoted much of his career to the protection of civic icons and doesn't hesitate to include the checkerboard-tile-floored White House among them. Owned by the Galaktiadis family since 1971, the diner is hailed by Atlanta's choosiest set for the hospitality and Greek-Southern plates that won over Cook. The Olympic omelet, teeming with spinach and served with tzatziki, is a favorite, as are the garlic-rubbed steak and gyro platter, along with the grits that Cook orders when he eats there with his mother. They have a standing weekend White House date.

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ADVENTURES

Vermont Calling

TUCKED INTO COOL MOUNTAIN FOOTHILLS, MANCHESTER BECKONS WITH A BREAK FROM SOUTHERN HEAT

By Monte Burke

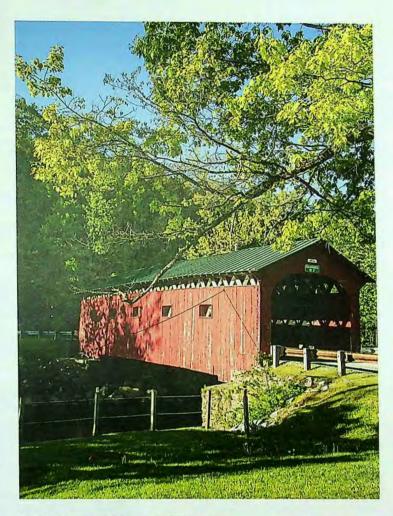
om Rosenbauer is standing by my side as we gaze over a pretty, meadow-lined stretch of Vermont's Battenkill River. "Get your fly tight to the other bank," he tells me, pointing across the water. "Then let it sink a bit and start stripping it." We're in Manchester, my favorite place to get away during the dog days of summer, where the quickening cool of mountain air replaces stagnant heat.

When Rosenbauer talks about fly fishing, I listen. I'm not the only one. Through his popular podcast, books, and videos, he has arguably become the sport's most influential teacher and promoter. His official title at Orvis-which is headquartered just a few miles away and where he has worked for the past forty-seven years-is Chief Fly-Fishing Enthusiast. Even now, at a whiskered and wizened sixty-nine years old, Rosenbauer is more into fly fishing than anyone else I know.

His enthusiasm is so infectious that after a few false starts, I have begun to reach the far bank with my fly. The Battenkill is well known for its small but beautiful native brook trout. But this evening, the river is rain swollen, so we are chucking heavy four-inch streamers in the hopes of connecting with the Battenkill's other famous denizens: its brown trout. They aren't plentiful, and they are notoriously difficult to catch, but they make up for it in quality-they can reach two feet. We make our way down the meadow, now glowing in the golden light, taking turns shooting out casts.

Manchester has been a lot of different things to me over the years. It was home until I was six, when my Yankee father made good on his wedding-day pledge to move to my mother's homeland of Alabama sooner rather than later. I got married in Manchester. I spent those strange, suspended first few months of the pandemicthere with my wife and three daughters, watching spring crawl up the mountainsides. We go there in the fall to catch the famous foliage. We go in the winter to ski at nearby Bromley and Stratton Mountains.

But summer is, by far, my favorite time to visit Vermont. Warm days become cool evenings. Everythingthe fields, trees, and mountains (those monts verts that gave the state its nickname)-seems brush-stroked in different shades of green, a sylvan counterpoint to the multitudinous blues of a Caribbean vacation. And there are more things to do-sight seeing, fishing,







SUMMER IS, BY FAR, MY **FAVORITE** TIME TO VISIT VERMONT. WARM DAYS BECOME COOL EVENINGS. **EVERYTHING** SEEMS BRUSH-STROKED IN DIFFERENT SHADES OF GREEN



From top: A covered bridge over the Battenkill River; Tom Rosenbouer casts in the Green Mountain National Forest.

hiking, and good eating—than you could fit into a month's time.

But let's say you had only a weekend to visit, perhaps a quick escape from Southern summer swelter. I have some ideas.

THE PLACE TO STAY IN MANCHESTER is the Equinox Golf Resort & Spa, in a building that dates back to 1769. It became an inn in the nineteenth century, when the area began its transformation from an iron-and-marble mining spot to a summer getaway for the well-to-do. The Equinox remains one of New England's grand resorts.

The hotel building, green-shuttered and graced with fluted columns, perches at the top of town. It faces the Green Mountains to the east as Mount Equinox, the highest peak in the Taconic Mountains, peeks over its shoulder from the west. The main hotel building has rooms with an 1800s feel but all of the modern comforts. Suites and larger units, some with fireplaces, are scattered about the outbuildings, and the house golden retriever, Cooper, might greet you. One could spend an entire weekend on resort property, bouncing among the spa, golf course, Land Rover off-road driving school, restaurant, and tavern. But there are far too many other things to see and do.

Just south of the Equinox, past the oldest part of town with its stately mansions and maple-shaded streets, stands Hildene, a Georgian Revival mansion on a now 412-acre estate built by Robert Todd Lincoln-son of Abraham-and occupied by Lincoln descendants until 1975. As a young man in 1864, Robert and his mother, Mary, traveled to Manchester (and stayed at the Equinox) to escape the heat of Washington, D.C., and the ongoing Civil War. Robert never forgot it, returning nearly four decades later-wealthy from his stint as the president of the Pullman Company-to build Hildene, which boasts commanding views of the Battenkill Valley. Tours of the home are a must-some of the original furniture, including pieces owned by Robert's parents, still fills it. The magnificent grounds include hiking trails, agoat dairy, and agarden where swaths of peonies bloom.

Clockwise from top left: The Equinox hotel's spa pool in Manchester; the Equinox entrance; Wilcox Ice Cream Stand on Route 7A; a rural roadside view. Double back on Main Street and head north into town. The next stop: the Orvis flagship retail store—Graceland for the fly-fishing set—with twenty-three thousand square feet of apparel, dog accessories, flies, and, of course, racks of gleaming fly rods with all their potential energy. (Pop into the Orvis Rod Shop, behind the store, to see where the magic happens and possibly even run into Orvis's lead fly rod developer, Shawn "Puffy" Combs, a Kentucky expat.) At the store, schedule a free casting lesson (check for dates) or enroll in a one-or two-day fly-fishing school that covers the basics. Those who have taken

the hook a bit deeper can stroll next door and visit the American Museum of Fly Fishing. Its fascinating artifacts include a fishing vest once owned by King Charles III (when he was but a mere prince).

Now it's time to get outside. Head up Route 30, which will takeyou through the charming town of Dorset. And then roll down the windows as you drive the stunning stretch of road that winds through the cornfields and farms of the Mettawee Valley. Stop at Mach's Market in the town of Pawlet for a scrumptious sandwich or salad, and then continue on and find a pull-off on the Mettawee River for a dip in its cold, crystal-clear water.

That night, dine at the Dorset Inn, which has a quintessential Vermont feel (think: the set for Newhart). Begin the meal with a WhistlePig Rye (a Vermont standby) or a Heady Topper, a hard-to-procure Vermont beer that's considered among the best IPAs in the world. Then order any of the local vegetables and the filet mignon with foie gras raviolo, and end with bread pudding

drenched in maple whiskey caramel.

Get a good night's sleep, because the next day starts with some cardio. While there are hundreds of hiking trails in the area, the best, for my money, are the ones found on the Equinox Preservation Trust property back in Manchester. Pack a lunch and pick a route on one of the thirteen trails there that range from a leisurely walk up to—and then around—the mirrored surface of Equinox Pond, to the strenu-

ous summit hike of Mount Equinox, which takes about four hours round trip.

Though Ben & Jerry's is Vermont's most famous ice cream, I like to reward myself after a hike with a cone from the Wilcox Ice Cream Stand, which sits south of town on Route 7A (and whose treats have been family made since 1928). It offers various delicious daily specials, but you can never go wrong with maple walnut.

Next stop is the Northshire Bookstore, one of the best "indies" in the country, with ten thousand square feet of books, including signed first editions from the likes of Charles Frazier and Carl Hiaasen. It's a

great place to browse if you need a new read but don't have a particular book in mind—the displays are enticing, the staff recommendations excellent.

From the Northshire, you can walk down Depot Street to shop more than twenty outlet stores, which include Polo Ralph Lauren, Brooks Brothers, and Vineyard Vines, as well as some local boutiques. Outlets are not my cup of tea, but even my jaded eye admits that the stores themselves—tastefully constructed with wood and brick—are done in a manner that fits the surrounding landscape.

If you're not in the mood to shop, drive along West Road to the Southern Vermont Arts Center. You'll pass an enormous steel sculpture resem-

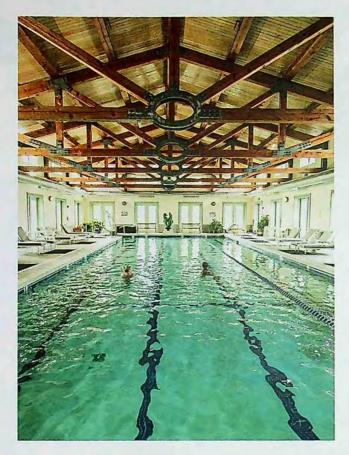
bling a pig on the winding entry road up to the museum, which encompasses a thirty-room former mansion on one hundred acres that back up to the Taconics. The center hosts art classes, a revolving list of exhibitions, and a permanent collection that includes works from the great sporting artist Ogden Pleissner.

On your last night in town, grab an early dinner (the Crooked Ram and the Silver Fork are both superb), and then head down to the Battenkill to fish the evening hatch (armed with the flies and advice you picked up at Orvis). The brook trout are usually pretty eager as the sun starts its descent behind Mount Equinox. If you're lucky, you just might get a shot at one of those leviathan browns—that is, if Rosenbauer hasn't beaten you to it.

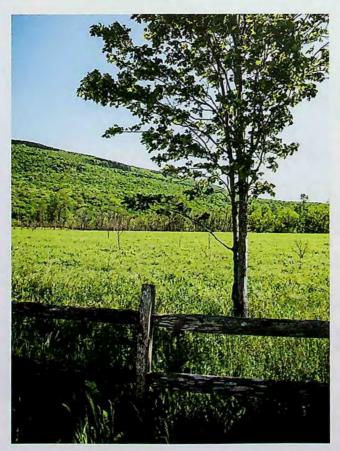


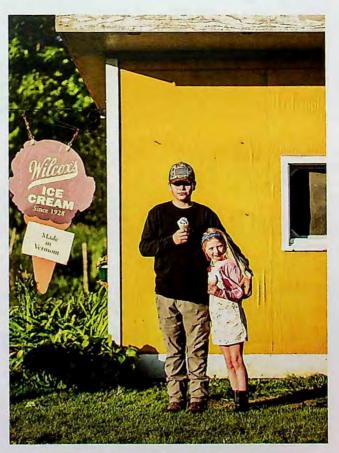
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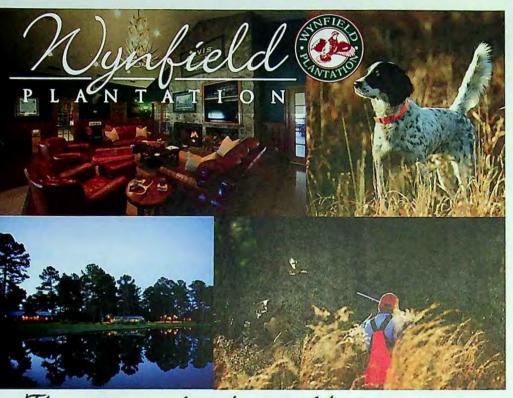




Glimpse a Rare Late-Blooming Azalea

STEWART COUNTY, GEORGIA

Near the end of summer, the floor of Providence Canyon blazes deep scarlet when the plumleaf azalea—the rarest azalea in the eastern United States—bursts into fiery splendor. "It blooms after everything else is finished," says Reba Bolton, an interpretive ranger at the canyon, part of a state park about an hour's drive from Columbus. "It normally



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SOUTHERN AGENDA

begins around July and goes through early fall. We have to stay on constant watch because once it starts blooming, the phones start blowing up." Dubbed Georgia's Little Grand Canyon, Providence formed in the late 1800s after farmers using unsustainable methods caused massive erosion. Today hikers meander along trails through the chasms and pinnacles that look like a painted desert-not at all like the rest of the Peach State. The plumleaf prefers a habitat so specific, it only grows in small pockets in Southwest Georgia and eastern Alabama. "It likes to be near creek beds and on steep ground with good drainage," Bolton says. The canyon's sandy, acidic soil is just right for the shrub, which can grow up to twenty feet tall. "We have other native azaleas like the piedmont azalea," Bolton says. "People often get them confused and ask me if that's the plumleaf and I say, no, it's pink!" Take it from Bolton, you'll know the bright red plumleaf when you

gastateparks.org/providencecanyon

OUTDOORS

Alabama

RAPID EFFECT

The bouncing, bubbling, wave-whipped currents of the new Montgomery Whitewater park's man-made channels rage in stark contrast to the smooth, serene flow of the adjacent Alabama River. And while the pumped white-water courses are the centerpiece of the 120-acre outdoor recreation facility in the state capital, they aren't the sole attraction. Raft guide manager Anthony Lopez, who got his start guiding at Charlotte, North Carolina's U.S. National Whitewater Center, is stoked about all its offerings: green spaces, trails, a restaurant and beer garden, an outdoor concert venue, and those Class II-IV roller-coaster rapids. "The adventure channel has six significant angle changes and really weaves and bends," he says, "calling for more technical guiding." Yet Lopez looks beyond paddling skills when hiring his crew. "A great guide is a good storyteller," he says, "connecting with the rafters and connecting them to each other, creating a fun, but also a really communal, experience."

montgomerywhitewater.com

HISTORY

Arkansas

SWEET RIDES

At the Museum of Automobiles in Morrilton, curator Tommy Hoelzeman scored the enviable job of periodically taking the collection of fifty-odd vehicles out for a spin. "You can't just crank them up and move them a hundred yards," he explains. "You've got to warm them up a little bit, see if the brakes work, all that, otherwise it'll all deteriorate." He's in charge of such novelties as an '81 DeLorean (sans the flux capacitor of its Back to the Future twin); a 1951 Cadillac that the museum's founder, Winthrop Rockefeller, piloted down from New York to Arkansas; a 1914 Cretors Popcorn Wagon from when "popped corn" was still a nation-sweeping novelty; and a pair of 1923 Climbers, the last known vehicles from Arkansas's only automobile manufacturer, the short-lived Climber Motor Corp. The core collection always remains on display. In addition, collectors will flaunt their prized 1960s Ford Econoline vans and pickups on September 3, and a slew of Airstreams will set up camp on October 26-good to know if you're into rare midcentury gems.

museumofautos.com

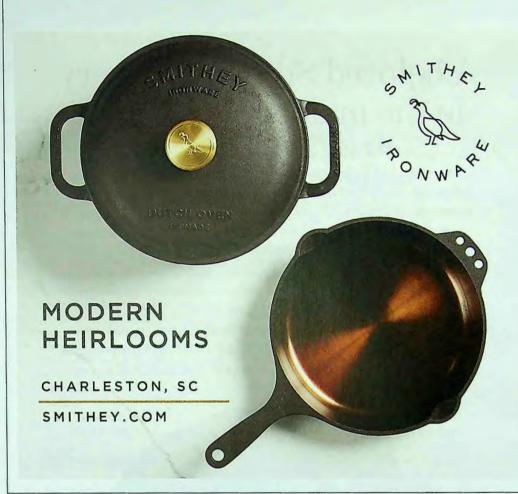


OUTDOORS

Florida

NESTING INSTINCTS

When a storm blew a young crested caracara falcon out of its cabbage palm nest this past spring, a South Florida Water Management District team rushed the fallen fledgling to Jupiter's Busch Wildlife





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SOUTHERN AGENDA

Sanctuary, which is celebrating forty years this year and is open to the public, with walking paths and animal observation areas. A close examination at the sanctuary's wildlife hospital revealed that the caracara was a bit dehydrated but otherwise healthy enough to go home. With the original nest wind strewn, the sanctuary worked with the management district to build a makeshift one right underneath the original; the parents were spotted back home with their offspring the following day. "Nest disturbances are not uncommon," says Christen Mason, the sanctuary's operations director. "If this happens in your yard, you can create a new nest using a basket, plastic strawberry container, or other container with holes. Secure the 'nest' to the tree as high up as possible, line it with leaves or grass clippings, and place the baby in it. The parents will continue to take care of their baby in this new nest."

buschwildlife.org

FOOD

Kentucky

FRIED AND TRUE

Little known outside of Louisville, the rolled oyster holds a special place in the pantheon of Southern fried food. Traditionally made from three oysters deepfried in a batter of egg, milk, and cracker meal, the softball-sized snack seems unremarkable-until you take your first bite. Kentucky native and writer Ronni Lundy once described the taste as "steamy and sexy, ocean-tanged, barroom-sullied, low rent, and high art." As with many masterpieces, there's controversy about the rolled oyster's origin story, says Louisville food critic and editor Marty Rosen. One version attributes the delicacy to Phillip Mazzoni, an Italian immigrant and saloon owner who first offered it as a giveaway to drinkers in the 1880s. Others trace it to Al Kolb's bar, which opened in 1865. Both taverns have long since closed, and a few years ago, some feared that rising oyster prices would do in the dish completely. But you can still find rolled oysters on the menu at Louisville-area taverns including Check's Café, KingFish, Hungry Pelican, and Mike Linnig's. "It's about as good as bar food gets," Rosen says. "When you bite through the hard shell, you get a sudden explosion from the perfume of the oyster."

- checkscafelouisville.com
- mikelinnigsrestaurant.com



Louisiana

SWAMP SOIREE

You never know who will show up along the road encircling Lake Martin in Breaux Bridge. Chef Bill Briand of Fisher's in Orange Beach, Alabama, remembers when he traveled over for a gig a few years ago and first saw the swampy Shangri-la that rose before him there: "All the Spanish moss hanging from oak limbs surrounded this quaint old house that looks like it's been there forever," he says of Maison Madeleine, an 1840 French Creole cottage turned bed-and-breakfast. For one of Maison Madeleine's Secret Suppers, Briand cooked whole pompano over a live fire and shucked Murder Point oysters alongside Lafayette, Louisiana, chef Jeremy Conner. Tickets disappear quickly for the dinner series, which features dishes from the South's favorite chefs and serenades from musicians whose ranks draw from Grammy winners. Two weeks before each shindig, Maison Madeleine reveals all the headliners, heightening the anticipation. After a summer hiatus, the monthly evenings of clandestine cookery return in September. maisonmadeleine.com/secret-suppers

FOOD

Maryland

THE CREPE BEYOND

Nestled along the Chesapeake Bay, the tiny town of Easton received a dose of French charm with the recent opening of P. Bordier, a creperie and patisserie. The cuisine hearkens back to Brittany, a hilly French peninsula known as the birthplace of the crepe. The restaurant uses Le Beurre Bordier butter, exclusively made in Brittany, and menu highlights include sweet, zingy citrus crepes, as well as savory buckwheat crepes with ham, Brie, chive butter, and mustard crème. "When I was asked to design the restaurant, my imagination immediately flew to Paris," says interior designer Shaun Jackson. With a cozy 315 square feet to work with, Jackson layered rose-hued wallpaper with lush tropical imagery, custom millwork, and checkerboard floors. A glass case teems with tarts and pastries such as the Cherry, an oversize confection filled with cherry compote, kirsch mousse, and devil's food cake.

pbordier.com

CONSERVATION

Mississippi

PRIMORDIAL WONDERS

Paddlefish, also known as spoonbill catfish, are relics swimming in our watersmore than a hundred million years ago, they coexisted with dinosaurs. Native to the Mississippi River basin, the threatened boneless fish with its impossibly long, paddle-shaped snout (called a rostrum) roams from New York to the Gulf of Mexico eating zooplankton. For a long-term study of its populations, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, & Parks tagged paddlefish eight years ago at Moon Lake in northwestern Mississippi, and the longlived individuals continue to pop up. "We had one that traveled two thousand miles all the way to South Dakota, and that was upstream," says Dennis Riecke, the department's fisheries coordinator. In the springtime, paddlefish, like their relative the sturgeon, are under threat as people harvest them for their caviar, but come summer. the adults head back downstream, and their tiny fry hatch by the thousands; fifty baby paddlefish weighed together equal a single gram. Lucky survivors grow an inch per week, and years later can stretch to seven feet long and weigh nearly two hundred pounds.

- mdwfp.com
- msaquarium.org

ARTS

North Carolina

CLOSE TO HOME

"Nina Simone's legacy needs a physical place that enshrines her contribution to our nation and where her legacy will live on," says Brent Leggs, the executive director of the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund. In 1933, Eunice Kathleen Waymon was born in Tryon, North Carolina, and less than two decades later. she launched her genre-blending musical career under the now famous stage name. In 2017, four Black artists (Adam Pendleton, Ellen Gallagher, Rashid Johnson, and Julie Mehretu) bought the three-room, 650-square-foot clapboard home where she grew up for \$95,000 to save it from demolition. Following a recent fundraising art auction cocurated by Pendleton and tennis star Venus Williams, this summer and fall will see a full restoration of the home. But a traditional house museum stuffed with artifacts guarded by velvet ropes is not in the plans, Leggs says. "Our vision is to create a place of education, reflection, and inspiration, open for art residencies and creating opportunities for youth, artists, and scholars." Simone, sometimes called the "high priestess of soul" after her 1967 album of that name. was much more than a performer—she was a lifelong civil and women's rights activist. "The physical preservation of her personal history and the chance to learn more







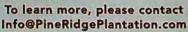
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SOUTHERN AGENDA

broadly about the historic Black community where the house sits will honor not only her legacy," Leggs says, "but also the legacy of those who were handed her torch."

savingplaces.org

CONSERVATION

South Carolina

JEWELS OF THE MARSH

From July into September, quarter-sized baby diamondback terrapins clamber from their nests above the high-tide line of South Carolina salt marshes. The continent's only turtles that live in such brackish estuaries, the terrapins once abundantly roamed the tidal creeks, pluff mud, and spartina grasses along the Eastern Seaboard. "They are so variable in coloration; their shells can be orange or green or brown or black, with a pattern that looks like diamonds," says Andrew Grosse, the state herpetologist for the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. Over the years, their populations have taken repeated hits-first because they starred in turtle soup along with sherry, and now due to entanglement in crab traps, car strikes, and coastal development. Grosse and his colleagues have raised and released young terrapins to boost numbers, developed crab traps that keep terrapins out, and conducted surveys to understand their habitats and movements. "Most people don't know they are out there," Grosse says, "but if you kayak or boat into a tidal creek early in the morning, look for little heads popping up in front of you." You can report any sightings to SCDNR to help with the research.

■ dnr.sc.gov

OPENING

Tennessee

A NEW FLAME

Chef Erik Niel was born in Texas, but he was raised in Louisiana and has made his name as the chef-owner of Chattanooga's heralded Main Street Meats and Easy Bistro & Bar. But texas smoke has never left his taste buds. "I realize that I am in Tennessee, where barbecue means something different than it does in Texas," he says. Later this summer, when he opens his newest restaurant, Little Coyote in Chattanooga's historic St. Elmo neighborhood, he'll pay homage to barbecue traditions that have long inspired him, including smoked meats and fish from Tex-Mex, Cuban, Caribbean, and Southwestern cuisines. Tequila and mezcal cocktails will complement chuck eye steak slow-smoked like brisket, as well as pork-stuffed tortillas with chimichurri. Amanda Niel, his wife and restaurant co-owner, incorporated Southwestern elements into the designcopper accents, ample houseplants, and turquoise-tinged terra-cotta tiles-and the new place sits mere steps away from the incline railway that carries passengers straight up Lookout Mountain.

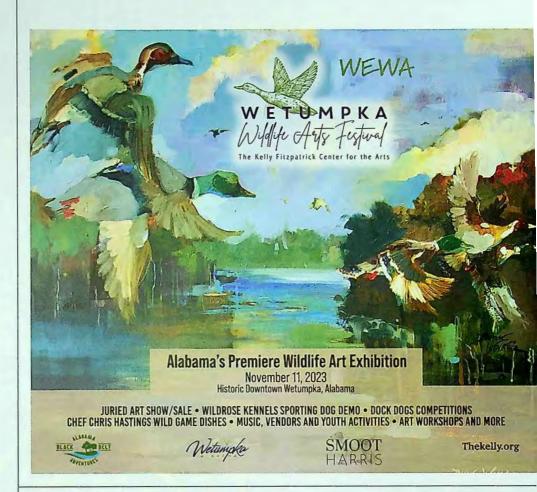
■ littlecoyote.com

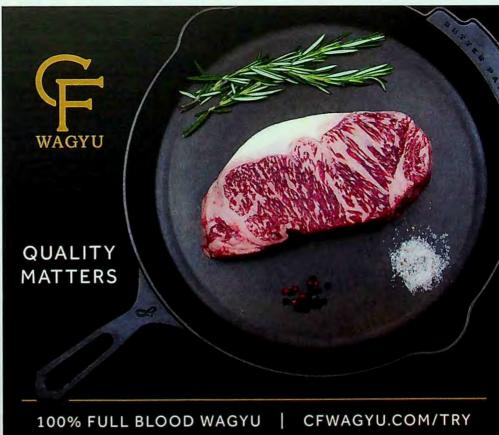
DRINK

Texas

GRAPE NEWS

Winemaking in Texas traces back to the mid-1600s, when Spanish missionaries planted the continent's first vineyard near what is now El Paso. Today the state boasts eight American Viticultural Areas and more than four hundred wineries, many of which take part in GrapeFest in Grapevine, the largest wine festival in the Southwest, September 14-17. There you can sample grenache, tempranillo, and Viognier while hearing firsthand how Texas winemakers have learned hard-won lessons. "A grapevine can live for over one hundred years," says Paul Bonarrigo, the CEO of Messina Hof Winery in Bryan. "During that time, droughts come and go, and we have experienced multiple droughts in the past. Therefore, it is less about modifying the grapevine and more about adjusting our practices to be smarter in the way we manage our resources." Greg Bruni, a winemaker with Llano Estacado Winery in Lubbock, agrees. "To do well in a hot, dry climate [like in the Texas High Plains], the method of irrigation becomes important," he says. Bruni credits drip and subsurface systems that deliver a controlled amount







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of water and nutrients to the roots of each plant. "This practice can save up to thirty percent in water and fertilizer." We'll drink to that.

grapevinetexasusa.com/grapefest

MUSIC

Virginia

A GIRL CAN DREAM

Sixty years after Patsy Cline died in a plane crash, her hometown of Winchester is still "Crazy" about her. On the Saturday before Labor Day, Winchester residents throw the Patsy Cline Music Festival to mark the September 8 birthday of the legendary singer, known for such searing songs of longing and heartbreak as "Walkin' after Midnight" and "I Fall to Pieces." This year the city plans to dedicate the new Patsy Cline Block Party, and the family's small wood-frame home, declared a National Historic Landmark in 2021, will offer tours and share tidbits about her humble roots and rise. "All four of her family members slept in one bedroom," says Hannah Mc-Donald, director of the Patsy Cline Historic House. Visitors can see the singer's favorite white cowboy hat, and the stage costumes she designed and her mother sewed. visitwinchesterva.com

ART

Washington, D.C.

POWER OF PLACE

"What stories remain untold on the National Mall?" asks a new exhibition, *Pulling Together*, which will be unveiled August 18. It's been sixty years since Martin Luther King Jr. led the March on Washington, and in commemoration, six visionary artists created large-scale artworks to answer that question. "The National Mall is our country's most memorable symbol of American democracy and site of our shared struggle for freedom," says cocurator Salamishah Tillet. One of the monumental works is *The Soil You See* by multimedia artist Wendy Red Star. Her giant transparent finger-



"Free Bird" Five-O

Lynyrd Skynyrd recorded (Pronounced 'Lěh-'nérd 'Skin-'nérd) in Doraville, Georgia's Studio One, spreading Southern rock around the globe upon its release in August 1973. Fifty years later, musicians shout out the debut album's tracks that still soar.

"Lynyrd Skynyrd is the perfect combination of talented songwriting, musicianship, and raw vocals that no one had ever heard until their debut album," says Texas country star Johnny Lee. "Free Bird' will forever be one of the best songs with a guitar solo that still leaves me begging for more."

"I started listening to their musio at a young age and always admired the lyrics to 'Simple Man," says the Virginia-raised artist Makenzie Phipps. "It was one of the very first songs I learned, and even today I still play it."

"'Tuesday's Gone' is a quintessential'! must be going now' song," says bassist Kevin MoManus of the Shootouts. "The melody just weeps, and the arrangement is not only poignant but incredibly thoughtful. It does not feel like a seven-and-a-half-minute song, like how saying a painful goodbye never seems long enough."

"Lynyrd Skynyrd's legaoy oan be wrapped up in two words: 'Free Bird," says singer William Lee Golden. "The song has become an anthem for all Southern rock." print features the names of the Apsáalooke (Crow) Nation chiefs who signed treaties with the U.S. government between 1825 and 1880. "It's an honor and a great opportunity," Red Star says, "to highlight the voices of Indigenous peoples throughout history and our contributions that have shaped the United States."

beyondgranite.org

CONSERVATION

West Virginia

RODENT REVIVAL

Karen Powers has a soft spot for Allegheny woodrats. "I love working with these adorable rodents," says Powers, a wildlife ecologist at Radford University in Virginia. "When we find their caches, they've taken anything colorful or shiny, from flags to coozies to handkerchiefs to people's keysthey're so curious." The squirrel-sized, round-eared rodents live in rocky areas and caves in deciduous forests, and last summer researchers trapped five in Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. "It was an exciting discovery," Powers says. "They are facing a triple threat from habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, and a roundworm, and we thought they hadn't been able to survive there." Allegheny woodrats still have a stronghold in Virginia, but with plummeting numbers elsewhere, including in West Virginia, attendees at a recent woodrat symposium hatched a plan for two zoos to start captive breeding. This summer, Powers and her partners will be out trapping and taking ear clippings for genetic analysis, looking for healthy, diverse candidates.

www.nps.gov/hafe/index.htm

—Susan B. Barnes, Larry Bleiberg, Caroline Sanders Clements, Jordan P. Hickey, Carrie Honaker, Jennifer Kornegay, Lindsey Liles, Lia Picard, and Cora Schipa

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BY ROY BLOUNT JR.

Walking on the Wild Side..

...OF NEW ORLEANS' FRENCH QUARTER

to a li a p

hen I say I have a home in the French Quarter of New Orleans, some people look at me askance. What is it *like*, they wonder, to live and walk around in such a place? These people need some perspective, if you

ask me, on living and walking around anywhere.

In Charles Portis's novel *The Dog of the South*, a Mrs. Symes asks the narrator:

"What about Heaven and Hell. Do you believe those places exist?"

"Well, I don't know," replies the narrator. "It's just so odd to think that people are walking around in Heaven and Hell."

"Yes, but it's odd to find ourselves walking around here too, isn't it?"

"That's true, Mrs. Symes."

We live in a quiet corner of the Quarter. Our neighbors come out on their stoops to sit and socialize. That in itself is unusual anywhere these days. But I do a lot of freerange walking in the Quarter, where—

Okay, maybe you read that a New Orleans lady tried to hold up a bank the other day while she was on a walker. But that was in another part of town. And she didn't get away with it. I have never come upon anything like that in the Quarter. In the Quarter, someone you don't know from Adam may well—less often now, but still—address you as "hon" or "baby," without meaning anything by it except that neither of you is stranger than the other.

Even if you are a tourist. French Quarter tourists are not the White Lotus crowd. Sometimes I think they have gotten tattooed, extensively, just for the sake of this vacation.

Tourists may be in evidence as they are borne along by mule-drawn carriages operated by freewheeling local narrators. I hear snatches of the often highly personalized historical notes that the carriage drivers toss off as they pass, and I fill in the gaps.

"Where you lay your head tonight may be..." fades away, and I add: "...where Tennessee Williams tossed and turned and dreamed The Rose Tattoo."

Which could be true.

"When you think about all the excuses for being late to work, 'I was dancing in the street..."

"...will get you a lot further here than it would back home."

Which is certainly true.

"Look to your left—what you see is nothing more, and nothing less..."

"...than the other obscene-T-shirt store you'd see if you looked to your right."

"Hold on to your liquor, folks, we trust you not to..."

"...slosh any of it onto what persists of the ashes of the saints."

I don't even know what I mean by that last one, except to evoke the party-time/ religious underpinnings of New Orleans culture, and it flows.

Once I heard a passing carriage driver make the following statement, including directions to the mule:

"Ironically [kk, whoa, whuh], Homer was an octoroon."

Nothing to add to that.

Pets. In the Quarter it is not unusual to run into a python being lugged around; or a pair of cockatoos; or a baby possum clinging to the back of a big brown rabbit. But far more common, like anywhere else: dogs. The other day! saw a conservatively dressed gray-haired couple, each of whom was walking a miniature collie with strikingly round, dark eyes.

"Oh!" I said to the couple. "Are your dogs wearing sunglasses?"

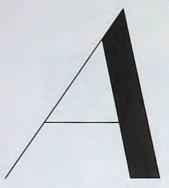
"Yes," said the lady of the people. And the dogs went coolly on along.

Do you know what a capybara is? The largest rodent on earth, native to the Amazon rainforest. (Where I have been.) Walking up Royal Street, I saw a woman walking a huge round dog that looked remarkably like a capybara. She, the woman, had garters and stockings tattooed on her legs all the way up to extremely short shorts. The capybara-looking dog veered off toward me, not necessarily in a threatening way-though I grant the animal could have inferred grounds for being protective, and since its face was so furry, it was hard to tell-and the woman tugged it, with some effort, back into the straightaway. Meanwhile she gave me the sort of look that an utterly untattooed woman in a suburban supermarket (where I have been) might give to a fellow shopper when her toddler has similarly strayed. It was the sort of look that comes accompanied by a roll of the eyes, close to a wink but not flirty, as if to say, "We all know how a capybara-looking dog can be sometimes." G

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Ambassadors of Taste

SOUTH CAROLINA CHEFS DISH ON THE REGION'S CULINARY LEGACY



mere glimpse of the Lowcountry lets you knowit's special. But how is this city's unique blend of effortless elegance and deep roots expressed explicitly in its food? For many of South Carolina's best chefs, the answer comes down to ingredients.

The Culinary Institute of Charleston's chef Kevin Mitchell, a 2020 South Carolina Chef Ambassador.

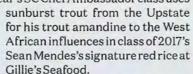
"Ithink the Charleston culinary aesthetic begins with place," chef John Ondo of the Atlantic Room at Kiawah Golf Resortsays. He would know. A Charleston native, Ondo spent last year as a South Carolina Chef Ambassador. The joint initiative developed by South Carolina's tourism and agriculture departments was enacted in 2014 to high-

light the state as a top culinary destination. Three outstanding chefs are selected each year to represent South Carolina and shine a light via event appearances, media interviews, and the video series *Greatness Grown* on the Palmetto State's remarkable foodways, signature dishes, and unique ingredients.

And Lowcountry ingredients are rich, from oysters and blue crab to shrimp and Carolina Gold rice, a commodity that defined the area's landscape and antebellum wealth. When South Carolina-based Anson Mills reintroduced it to the commercial market more than a decade ago, it ignited many chefs' imaginations. It's now grown by multiple producers, including on Kiawah Island. Ondo especially loves to prepare Carolina Gold rice middlings, or "broken rice," boiling it in a big pot of water so the grains separate.

Other chefs feel the same about this deeply Charleston culinary component. South Carolina Chef Ambassadors Michelle Weaver, who represented Charleston Grill in the class of 2018; Forrest Parker (formerly of the Drawing Room and now running his own culinary tour company), class of 2016; and Marc Collins of Circa 1886 all say Carolina Gold remains a staple because it's so quint-essentially Charleston. And celebrating these culinary traditions is what their ambassador work is all about.

"Looking to the past has given us a way to be historically connected while allowing us to expand Southern foodways," Collins (class of 2019) says. "Chefs these days are story tellers, and Charleston has a great story." That story is as diverse as the cultures—European, African, West Indian—that came through this vibrant port, showing up everywhere on the plate from the French influences at Rue de Jean, where chef Marcus Shell, representing this year's SC Chef Ambassador class uses



Kevin Mitchell, class of 2020, teaches at the Culinary Institute of Charleston and says, "When I use ingredients historically connected to Charleston, that lets me feel connected to this place, too."

There's alchemy afoot when culinary excellence meets Charleston ingredients, and that magic begins in the fields and the waters surrounding them. Charleston chefs embrace the city's diverse culinary heritage—writing its story, one plate at a time.



CHEF RESTAURANTS

Eat like a Local

Taste the ambassadors' regionally inspired cuisine

The Atlantic Room

Given its proximity to the best seafood purveyors, it's only fitting that the Atlantic Room serves the finest local seafood. Taste the difference in chef John Ondo's she-crab soup and shrimp and grits. @KiawahResort KiawahResort.com

Charleston Grill

Michelle Weaver established Charleston Grill as a prestige dining experience.

Now Weaver's protégé, Suzy Castelloe, continues that commitment to excellence with dishes like Palmetto Pigeon Breast, Heron Farm Sea Beans, and, naturally, Carolina Gold rice.

@Charleston_Grill
CharlestonPlace.com

Circa 1886

Located in a historic carriage house, Circa 1886 is a truly authentic Charleston dining experience. Chef Marc Collins plates the past in dishes like his cornmeal-crusted flounder with Sea Island peas and collard-green sauce. @Circa1886 Circa1886.com

Gillie's Seafood

Start with a hush puppy basket, then sample seafood purloo with a side of fried okra or maybe some lima beans. You won't find a more locally flavored plate than at Sean Mendes's family-owned and -operated Gillie's Seafood.

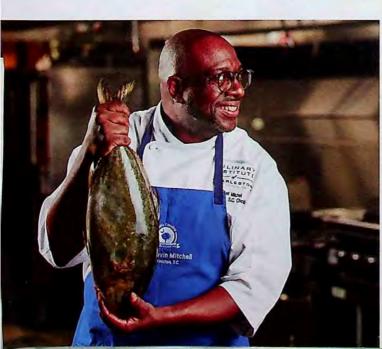
@GilliesSeafood
GilliesSeafood.com

Rue de Jean

Rue de Jean may be a French brasserie, but chef Marcus Shell ensures local ingredients still have a place of honor. Consider his local catch, a daily interpretation of the best seafood available in the region.

@39RuedeJean

HolyCityHospitality.com



Mint Julep Dinner

Austin, Texas

At the iconic Hotel Magdalena, Garden & Gun and Louisville Tourism toasted Mint Julep Month in the heart of Music Lane in Austin, Texas. The evening kicked off with a special cocktail hour, followed by a seated dinner featuring three courses of Kentucky-inspired fare from Louisville chef Andrew McCabe of bar Vetti, paired with creative spins on the classic cocktail, such as an Elderflower Mint Julep with Boxergrail Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey, St. Germaine, lavender bitters, and soda water from Rabbit Hole Distillery.

1. Anthony Gilmer, Ryan Isemeyer, and Darrell Watson. 2. A family-style side of crispy potatoes, salsa verde, and whipped Taleggio. 3. Custom escort card flags displayed in vintage Derby glasses inform guests where to sit. 4. Chef Andrew McCabe thanks guests at the end of the evening.

















APRIL 27

Taste of Tennessee

Louisville, Kentucky

In partnership with Visit Sevierville, Garden & Gun brought the tastes of Tennessee to Kentucky's celebrated Barn8 Restaurant at Hermitage Farm, with a cocktail reception in the farm's greenhouse and a multicourse meal in the barn's private hayloft. While chef Deron Little of Sevierville's Seasons 101 Restaurant treated guests to cinnamon-scented quail, braised beef short ribs, and flourless chocolate truffle, Danielle Parton of Shine Girl Spirits served creative moonshine cocktails inspired by the Volunteer State.

FOR MORE, VISIT GARDENANDGUN.COM/EVENTS

5. Danielle Parton, owner and founder of Shine Girl Spirits. 6. The Botanical Spritz: Shine Girl Rosé, Shine Girl Lavender Moonshine, strawberry, lime, and honey. 7. Hermitage Farm, site of Barn8 Restaurant. 8. Braised beef short ribs with creamy stone-ground grits, Benton's bacon collard greens, and pearl onion jus. 9. From left: Sevierville Chamber of Commerce's Amanda Marr, director of marketing and communications; Nikki Bounds, chair; Brenda McCroskey, CEO; Tony Funderburg, director of sales and marketing: Michael Johnson, Sherry Johnson, and Sheah Little, Seasons 101 Restaurant co-owners; Ashli Arden, project manager for Visit Sevierville.

APRIL 30

Sunday Supper with Stephanie Tyson and Vivián Joiner

Atlanta, Georgia

In April, the Garden & Gun Club at the Battery Atlanta, in partnership with Visit Winston-Salem, hosted a Sunday Supper with Sweet Potatoes, (Well Shut My Mouth!)— a restaurant co-owned by Vivián Joiner and chef Stephanie Tyson. Chef Tyson, a two-time James Beard Award nominee, treated guests to a three-course family-style dinner of down-home Southern favorites, including sweet potato cornbread, fried chicken, and baconwrapped pork loin stuffed with North Carolina barbecue, while Ginger Fox Beverage served creative cocktails.

10. From left: Maria Hayworth, Hayworth PR president; Visit Winston-Salem's Marcheta Cole Keefer, director of marketing and communications; Sweet Potatoes, (Well Shut My Mouth!)—a restaurant co-owners Vivián Joiner and chef Stephanie Tyson. 11. Second course: fried chicken. 12. David Bowen of the Ginger Fox, in Winston-Salem, mixes a cocktail on the patio.















MAY 3

Dockside Dinner Party

Charleston, South Carolina

On May 3, Garden & Gun and Barton & Gray Mariners Club presented a Dockside Dinner Party at a private residence in Charleston. Guests boarded two Barton & Gray Hinckley yachts for a cruise across the Charleston Harbor to the alfresco event for live music, appetizers, cocktails, and wine courtesy of Bar Rollins. Following cocktail hour, guests were seated for a waterfront four-course meal prepared by James Beard Award-winning author and chef Melissa Martin of Mosquito Supper Club in New Orleans.

13. Second course: Louisiana crawfish bisque with crawfish heads. 14. Barton & Gray's Razorbill delivers guests to dinner. 15. Emily and Josh Broome with Frank Kenan and Naomie Olindo. 16. The waterfront cocktail hour.

MAY 5

A Stitzel-Weller Affair

Louisville, Kentucky

In advance of the 149th Kentucky Derby, Blade and Bow Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey hosted the annual Stitzel-Weller Affair—a special alfresco event featuring signature bourbon cocktails, live music by Nashville's Bobby Cool, Southern-inspired fare by Wiltshire Pantry, and exclusive pours of the limited-release Blade and Bow 22-Year-Old Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey.

17. Neat pours of 22-Year-Old Blade and Bow Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey. 18. A must-have photo from the event: a picture with a retired racehorse.





2023

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER





PROMOTION





MAY 11-12

Women in the Field

Cashiers and Highlands, North Carolina

This past spring, as part of the Women in the Field series, Garden & Gun hosted its tenth annual Ladies' Fly Fishing excursion in Highlands and Cashiers, North Carolina. The weekend kicked off on May II with an inviting cocktail hour and welcome dinner at the Highlander Mountain House, with a menu featuring local ingredients and wine pairings. Early Friday morning, guests embarked on a day of guided fly fishing followed by an awards reception with appetizers and cocktails hosted at Brookings Anglers.

19. A toast before the second course: a choice of seared Carolina mountain trout or rack of lamb. 20. Gage LeQuire and Elaine Lee float the Tuckasegee River with their Brookings Anglers guide. 21. A Brookings Anglers expert nets Renee Johnson's catch. 22. The Highlander Mountain House welcomes guests for dinner at its Ruffed Grouse Tavern.



A Forbidden Evening

Charleston, South Carolina

In celebration of master distiller Marianne Eaves's newest bourbon, Forbidden, Garden & Gun hosted A Forbidden Evening in Charleston, South Carolina. Tastemakers and VIP guests enjoyed the small-batch, hand-blended five-year-old bourbon and live music from the Hot Club band in a historic downtown locale.

23. The charcuterie spread featuring various meats, aged cheeses, whole fruits, and savory vegetables. 24. Sarah Louise Rhodes and Billy Dreyer. 25. Forbidden partners Murray Baroody; Daniel Rickenmann, mayor of Columbia, South Carolina; Marianne Eaves; Sara Middleton; Michael Fawcett; and Brad Valdes. 26. A first look at the inaugural release of Forbidden.









FOR MORE, VISIT GARDENANDGUN.COM/EVENTS

MORE, FIST GARDENANDGUN.COM/EVENTS

SIGNATURE EVENTS

Mark your calendar for these upcoming *Garden & Gun* experiences



A Southern Neapolitan Night

September 14 Naples, Florida

G&G and the Paradise Coast present an intimate dinner showcasing Naples, Florida. Enjoy an Italian-meets-Southern menu in the Campiello restaurant featuring chefs from Campiello, the Continental, and Ziggy D'Amico's for a meal complemented by Rose Gold wine and Italian cocktails made with Blade and Bow Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey.



Cast & Blast

September 14-16 Lake Charles, Louisiana

In partnership with Visit Lake Charles, G&G hosts its sixth annual Cast & Blast event at Grosse Savanne Lodge. Experience two fishing outings, followed by two morning hunts on the opening days of teal season. Throughout the weekend, guests will enjoy delicious game dinners prepared by Grosse Savanne head chef Matt Whitney.



G&G at Discover ADAC

September 19 Atlanta, Georgia

As part of Atlanta Decorative Arts Center's (ADAC) three day celebration of interior design, join G&G style director Haskell Harris as she hosts an engaging panel discussion at the Baker | McGuire showroom with designers Anna Booth, Elaine Griffin, and Amy Morris on the subject of integrating unique room-altering pieces into their designs.



Cocktails & Conservation

September 21 Asheville, North Carolina

G&G and Visit Asheville honor the second annual Champions of Conservation in the October/ November issue during an evening of thought-provoking conversation. Following an inviting cocktail hour, guests will hear from the champions. themselves in a panel discussion hosted by G&G editor in chief David DiBenedetto.



G&G Bourbon **Block Parties**

September 22 & November 17 Louisville, Kentucky

Join Garden & Gun at the Stitzel-Weller Distillery to celebrate the launch of G&G's latest issues with Bourbon Block Parties Guests have the opportunity to celebrate the newest edition of the magazine while enjoying live music, local food trucks, artisanal wares, and signature Blade and Bow cocktails by a Southern mixologist.



Bourbon Heritage Dinner

September 28 Dallas, Texas

Together with Louisville Tourism, G&G hosts a festive event in celebration of Bourbon Heritage Month. Guests are invited to the Thompson Hotel's Monarch restaurant for a seated dinner prepared by Louisville's celebrated chef Edward Lee, Enjoy modern Korean flavors from his latest restaurant, Nami, paired with Blade and Bow Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey cocktails.



Keeneland Cocktail Brunch

October 8 Lexington, Kentucky

Celebrate the opening weekend of Fall Meet at Keeneland by joining G&G at the twelfth annual Keeneland Cocktail Brunch. Before the races, guests will be treated to a signature Southern brunch at Lexington's newest hotel, the Manchester, and festive cocktails from Blade and Bow Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey.



An Art Affair

October 27-28 New Smyrna Beach, Florida

G&G invites art lovers to immerse themselves in New Smyrna Beach, Florida's creative community this fall. Enjoy a plein air dinner on the coast at the oldest home in the city, meet with artists during an intimate gallery walk, and experience local fare at a design-inspired Southern luncheon.



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AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2023

G&G FIELD REPORT

FOR MORE, VISIT GARDENANDGUN.COM/EVENTS



11th Annual Shoot

November 4 Adairsville, Georgia

Save the date for G&G's 11th Annual Shoot in partnership with Only in Cartersville Bartow and Barnsley Resort. Following a friendly 15-station, 100-round sporting clays tournament, guests are invited to celebrate with Chicken Cock Whiskey cocktails, a Southern lunch, and an awards ceremony.



G&G Society Gathering

November 9-12 Boca Grande, Florida

Mark your calendar for the G&G Society Gathering. Join G&G at the Gasparilla Inn & Club for an unforgettable weekend. Curated activities include brunch and boating with Barton & Gray, a fishing excursion with G&G editor in chief David DiBenedetto, a croquet match, and special guest appearances along with incredible food and beverage pairings.

FIELD REPORT DESTINATIONS

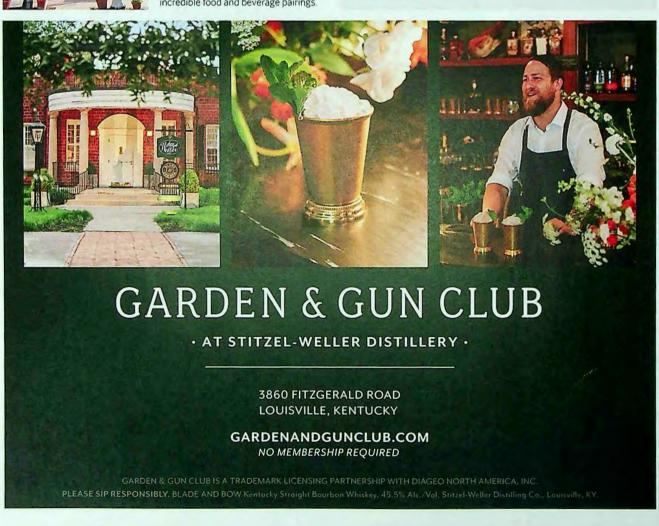
A guide to adventures in the South and beyond



FORT WORTH

With more than a dozen remarkable cultural districts to explore, Fort Worth is the Modern West. Book a trip to discover this unexpected city.

> FortWorth.com 800.433.5747



14



FROM RICH CULTURE COMES GREAT CUISINE

From seafood harvested straight from the Atlantic Ocean to locally grown fruits and vegetables, South Carolina is the perfect destination to savor your next farm-to-fork meal. Across the state, South Carolina's Chef Ambassadors craft seasonally inspired menus, put their own twists on Southern classics and create dishes that define the cuisine of the Palmetto State. Plan your next culinary adventure at **DiscoverSouthCarolina.com**

Vitamin Sea

THE LOWCOUNTRY'S MOST SPECTACULAR WATERFRONT VIEWS





harleston's coastline has been its calling card since its founding. The city's secure harbor allowed early settlers to safely make port, while its lengthy vantage points provided for essential defense. Today the overwhelming appeal of the Charleston area's coastline is the diversity of its beach towns, each of which has its own vibrant personality, and invites you to rest and relax in a decidedly distinct way.

Offering six miles of sandy shoreline and a bustling city center that includes an oceanfront music venue, Isle of Palms is a favorite for active families. A resort on the island's north end offers top-tier tennis and golf, while a public marina opens the door to water sports aplenty. Head south, crossing over Breach Inlet, and you'll arrive at

 $picture sque \, Sullivan's \, Island, a \, serene \, and \, largely \, residential \, three-mile \, island \, that's \, replete \, with \, Revolutionary \, Warhistory, \, delicious \, dining, \, and \, wide \, beaches$

no matter the tide.

On the opposite side of Charleston Harbor is Folly Beach, a funky, friendly town nicknamed the Edge of America, where surfers, fishermen, and families all flock. Come for a beach day, but stay for the laid-back restaurant and bar scene that comes alive when the sun sets. If you're desiring a more off-the-grid vacation, head farther south to Kiawah Island, a ten-mile strip of coastline where a world-class resort and private homes are tucked within a maritime forest. Locals flock to its Beachwalker Park, a soft white sand public beach with lifeguards, beach chair and boogie board rentals, and wheelchair-accessible ramps. When not on the pristine beach, you'll want to bike, hike, or golf your way through the verdant landscape, keeping watch for wildlife as you go. Finally, farthest south is Seabrook Island. a private slice of oceanfront paradise. On the gated barrier island, you can horseback ride along the shore, kayak through the Intracoastal Waterway, golf on two unique courses, enjoy birding in an Audubon International Certified Sustainable Community, and dine while overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

The decision may be difficult, but rest assured that you simply can't go wrong with whichever sandy path you choose.

Clockwise from left: Crab legs and corn from Charleston Harbor Fish House; Shem Creek at sunset; Fleet Landing's seafood pasta.

Culinary Classic

MY FAVORITE LOWCOUNTRY DISH IS...

"I'm particularly fond of making okra gumbo. It has cultural relevance and includes many ingredients that I love. It can also be a deeply personal dish— I break tradition and make mine with all seafood."

Mike Lata

Co-owner and chef of the Ordinary and FIG



RESTAURANTS

Dockside Dining

What pairs best with the catch of the day? A view of the water, of course

Charleston Crab House

"You hook it! We cook it!" is not a phrase you hear at many restaurants these days. But it's the case at Charleston Crab House, a twenty-seven-year-old Charleston institution. It's located right on beautiful Shem Creek and you can reel in supper steps from the dining room. The chef will do the rest.

@CharlestonCrabHouse
CharlestonCrabHouse.com

Charleston Harbor Fish House

Charleston Harbor Fish House doesn't just serve outstanding seafood, it gives guests a look at the region's naval history. View the USS Yorktown, a World War Il aircraft carrier, from its deck.

@CHFishHouse
CharlestonHarborFishHouse.com

Fleet Landing Restaurant & Bar

Originally home to the Cooper River ferry that took passengers to Mount Pleasant, today Fleet Landing is a casual restaurant and bar with ample outdoor seating that affords views of Fort Sumter in the distance.

@FleetLanding

@FleetLanding FleetLanding.net

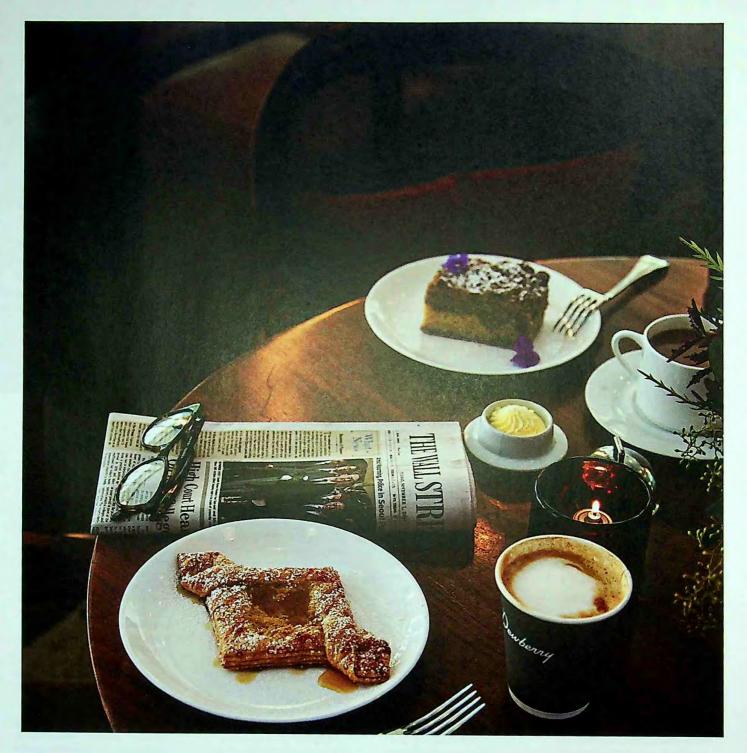
Islander 71 Fish House & Deck Bar

Views of the Intracoastal Waterway don't come any finer than at Islander 71 on the Isle of Palms. Enjoy crab cake sandwiches and craft cocktails served with some of the best sunsets in the region.

@Islander71IOP

Islander71.com





The Dewberry

A LUXURY HOTEL OFFERING OLD-WORLD CHARM WITH A DISTINCTIVE MODERN EDGE.

THEDEWBERRYCHARLESTON.COM

334 MEETING STREET . CHARLESTON, SC . 843.558.8000

If dining your way through a world-class culinary scene is more your style, center your search on the Charleston peninsula. A number of hotels are home to award-winning restaurants; many others are a stone's throw away from them. Don't be shy when making your boutique hotel reservations; ask the concierge for dining recommendations, as he may have some strings to pull at sought-after establishments, potentially scoring a table you otherwise may have missed out on.

Perhaps you're an art or design lover and luxury to you means impeccable architecture and interiors polished off with original art. Whatever style you adore—midcentury modern, Second Empire, contemporary—there's a Charleston inn for you. Some even boast in-house galleries, or a collection of ever-rotating local artists' works adorning hallways, urging you to slow down and soak up the details, which, of course, a vacation is all about.

A number of Charleston-area hoteliers tap into the wealth of talent in the region to offer amenities infused with a local narrative, bringing the soul and spirit of the Holy City right to your door. That could look like a welcome cocktail mixed with locally made liquor and muddled fruit from a nearby farm, or a custom history tour that's available only to hotel guests.

As you narrow down the search for your perfect Lowcountry lodging, look for details that ignite your curiosity and stories that sparkjoy. Do ample research and revel in the hunt; after all, the prelude to a trip is half the fun. And remember, you can always choose a new adventure the next time you visit.





HOTELS

Inn Good Company

Luxury accommodations abound in Charleston.
These are some of the choicest:

The Charleston Place

With facades overlooking King,
Meeting, and Market Streets—three
of the most iconic thoroughfares in
Charleston—the Charleston Place,
which debuted in 1986, is a local institution. A recent change in ownership
has enlivened the beloved brand with
blockbuster holiday programs and
design upgrades, perks that further
enhance the world-class dining,
shopping, and spa experiences the
hotel was founded on.
@TheCharlestonPlace
CharlestonPlace.com

Emeline

With an in-house restaurant and buzzy coffee shop that locals and visitors alike frequent, Emeline is known for its vibrant spirit. Add to that luxurious rooms, an intriguing collection of curios, and a Church Street location mere feet from Charleston's historic City Market, and it's no wonder that adventure-loving travelers have flocked to this boutique hotel since its 2020 debut.

@HotelEmeline

Hotel Bennett

Dreamed up by a South Carolinian and housed in a nine-story Italian palazzo-style building that's over-flowing with marble and overlooks Marion Square (a grassy park in Charleston's city center), Hotel Bennett marries old-world European charm with Southern hospitality. In addition to its opulent rooms, highlights include a heated rooftop pool, French-style patisserie, and gracious terrace for alfresco dining. @HotelBennett

The Loutrel

Amenities abound at the Loutrel, a new boutique hotel that offers garden-inspired design and refreshingly residential touches, such as ambrosial hallways and an orchid in every room. Complimentary happy hours draw guests to the private rooftop terrace (that boasts a view of downtown Charleston's Historic District) or the fresh floral-filled lobby, which feels like a well-appointed Charleston piazza.

@TheLoutrelCharleston
TheLoutrel.com

Mills House

For nearly two centuries, the elegant Mills House hotel has been a symbol of opulence in the heart of the Historic District. Following extensive renovations, the iconic pink building is now even more attractive. Redesigned guest rooms and suites, a pool, two new eateries, and a rooftop bar overlooking the city were unveiled in 2022 and provide guests with a historic Southern stay with every modern luxury.

@MillsHouseHotel
MillsHouse.com

The Palmetto

Lounging in the lobby of downtown Charleston's newest boutique hotel, you feel as though you're visiting a fashionable friend's house, one who can whip up a delicious cocktail and has parlor games at the ready. The petite inn's polished interiors offer a fresh perspective on historic Charleston, and its address puts you two blocks from the city's architecturally rich South of Broad neighborhood.

@PalmettoHotelCharleston
ThePalmettoHotelCharleston.com

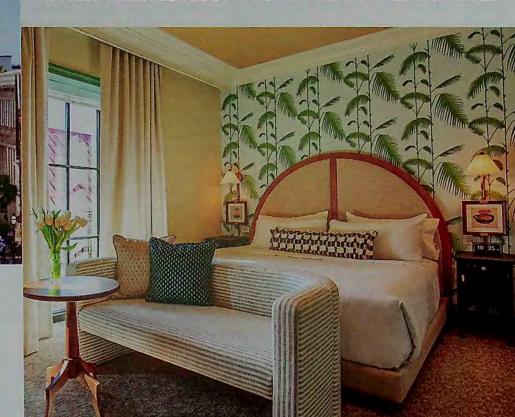
Sweetgrass Inn

If bouncing between beach and pool—pausing for delicious fare and spirits along the way—is your idea of R&R, the new Sweetgrass Inn at Wild Dunes Resort on Isle of Palms awaits. This contemporary hotel adds a luxurious spa, sprawling pool deck, and more fabulous shopping to the oceanfront resort's existing list of perks (which include an awardwinning tennis program and Tom Fazio-designed golf oourses).

@WildDunesResort
DestinationHotels.com

Suite Dreams

A GUESSWORK-FREE GUIDE TO FINDING A GREAT CHARLESTON HOTEL





From left: Guests on a balcony at the Charleston Place hotel; a window box; a room at the Palmetto hotel; an aerial view of Hotel Bennett.

An Insider Suggestion

MY FAVORITE WAY to SPEND a DAY OUTSIDE IS...

"Ilove to go on a long walk around town to look at all the houses and window boxes."

Mariana Hay Avant Designer of the Goldbug Collection ave a sojourn to the Lowcountry coming up? There's one thing you'd be wise not to rush: deciding where to lay your head at night. Hotels in the Charleston area don't just provide a comfortable bed to retire to (though that they certainly do); each establishment is imbued with an original personality and perspective that will inform your trip from start to finish. Even if you wished to make a speedy decision, it'd be difficult to do so, as you'll quickly notice that the Lowcountry has an abundance of luxury accommodations, ranging from quiet boutique inns to bustling hotels and sprawling oceanside resorts.

So how does one choose? Picture your ideal vacation. If that looks like a coastal getaway replete with ocean views and beachside sips, look to the luxury resorts housed on the Lowcountry's barrier islands. There, you'll have easy access to pristine strips of some of South Carolina's finest beaches, as well as on-site entertainment—restaurants and spas, boutiques and bars—ample enough that you won't need to leave the premises, unless you desire. An assortment of pools and dining options cater to both boisterous young families and solace-seeking couples, making these accommodations a smart fit for any traveler wishing to take a daily dip in the Atlantic Ocean. Avid golfers should consider beachside resorts too, as they're home to some of the East Coast's premier courses.

But ahhh, spring, glorious spring brings its own romance. Jasmine and wisteria transform already lovely garden walls into perfume factories, while house and garden tours offer backstage access to Charleston's most stunning residences. As the days grow longer, so does the list of events and adventures to choose from: the Bridge Run, kayaking and fishing expeditions, professional women's tennis, High Water Music Festival, and on and on.

Home, really, is the heart of the Holy City. History lives here because real people live, work, play, shop, garden, go fishing and sailing, dance and sing along-loud and proud to hometown rock star Darius Rucker and Grammy-winning band Ranky Tanky-here. Charleston's soul and warmth emanate from real personalities. Like your server last night at Husk-a former high school soccer standout in West Ashley, now earning her master's at the Citadel. Like the artist Jonathan Green, who lives right by Charleston Place, where he can be found most Monday evenings deep in salon-like conversations with judges, writers, chefs, and whoever stops by. Like the sweetgrass basket weavers by the courthouse and in the Market who grew up in Charleston or right over the bridge in Mount Pleasant, learning their craft from their mothers and grandmothers, who were in turn taught by their mothers and grandmothers. And like those lovely women who ensured your Croghan's splurge was exactly what you longed for; they're fourth-generation Charlestonians running a century-old King Street family jewelry business, not to mention active volunteer leaders of umpteen community organizations. And even like the mayor, a lifelong Charlestonian, who can be found playing the piano at an art opening or a Piccolo Spoleto event.

Homegrown personality and authentic flavor. not James Beard Awards (though our chefs deserve and win them), are what make our food taste so good. From the way farmer Sidi Limehouse, thanks to decades cultivating Johns Island fields, knows exactly when to harvest his prized tomatoes, to how Carrie Morey takes delicious liberty when embellishing her mom Callie's famous biscuits, to the way chef Mike Lata, with his effortless touch, can create a restaurant named the Ordinary and make it anything but. Likewise, personality infuses Charleston architecture, from ornate cornices that entice you to look up, to iconic ironwork on gates and balconies handcrafted by the late master blacksmith Philip Simmons. Charleston's neighborhoods are hands-on laboratories for how to love and care for old things and how to honor the past while embracing the future. Yes, Longitude Lane and Philadelphia Alley retain their snug old-world charm, but look closely-young families live around the corner. Kids on bikes whiz by.

This is Charleston's extrasensory specialty—a sense of defying expectation. And the best season to visit Charleston is the one when you are here. Come early, stay late. We'll take care of the rest.

Plan your own adventure at ExploreCharleston.com





ACTIVITIES

A Region for All Seasons

While you might not want to swim in the ocean when it's cold, almost everything people love about Charleston is available year-round

Charleston Museum

One of the oldest museums in the country, Charleston Museum has a collection that spans 4.6 billion years and includes archaeological gemslike a full skeleton of a North Atlantic right whale, historic textiles including intricate antebellum dresses, and priceless antiques such as George Washington's christening cup.

@CharlestonMuseum
CharlestonMuseum.org

Edmondston-Alston House

Built in 1825 by Scottish shipping merchant Charles Edmondston, this home is an important example of the rise of the merchant planter class in the city. Take a thirty-minute tour to learn how it later became the headquarters of PGT Beauregard during the bombardment of Fort Sumter in April of 1861.

@EdmondstonAlstonHouse
EdmondstonAlston.org

Golf

In Charleston, there are definitely
"fore" seasons. Tee off anytime of year
at more than thirty world-class golf
courses. Play seaside at Wild Dunes or
Kiawah, or take your pick of municipal
courses and pro-worthy clubs.

@ExploreCharleston
CharlestonGolfGuide.com

International African American Museum

IAAMuseum.org

The IAAM tells the stories of those oaptured and brought to Gadsden's Wharf, where 40 percent of this country's enslaved people first disembarked. With twelve permanent exhibits and rotating special displays, the museum illuminates the African American experience in the Lowcountry and beyond.

@IAAMuseum

Holy City Hello

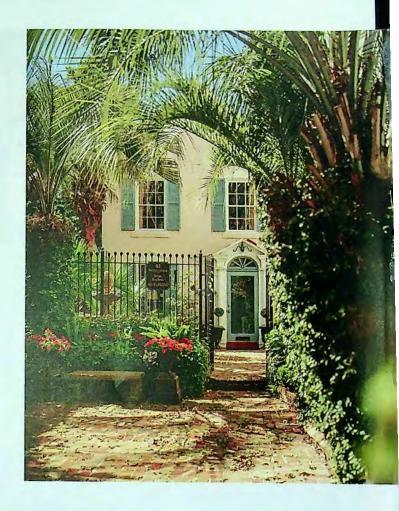
CHARLESTON MAKES EVERYONE FEEL RIGHT AT HOME



amellias may be the first hint. These showstopping blooms of seemingly infinite varieties adorn Charleston, South Carolina, gardens in the calm of winter, their porcelain-like petals a kiss of spring while most of the country still shivers. In gorgeous nonchalance, camellias signal this place is different. Then jasmine erupts in April, dowsing the Lowcountry in its perfume. Breathe it all

in, the tiny white blossoms whisper. Breathe in the salty breeze off the harbor, the brown-sugar whiffs of pralines on Market Street, yes, even the horsey hints of carriages moseying by. To love this place is to inhale beauty, to gasp in wonder.

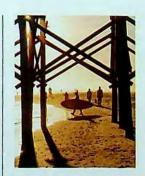
That's the magic of Charleston—it ignites all senses and then some. There's, of course, the see-hear-taste-touch-smell check-list: Charleston's unrivaled visual splendor; the hourly chorus of church bells; the decadent brine of oysters and sweetness of shrimp fresh off the docks; that time-machine feel of cobblestones underfoot; the heady aroma of jasmine, tea olives, and magnolias—just for starters. But beyond that, other more subtle sensibilities give Charleston its nuance. Consider, for instance, its deep sense of history; its sense of memory, regret, and reverence; its delightful sense of surprise (Wait, really? A Shepard Fairey mural on Calhoun Street!); its sense of unbounded creativity and possibility; and perhaps most powerful of all, Charleston's sense of welcome, of home, even to those who don't live here.



From left: Cocktails from the Palmetto hotel; the Nicholas Trott House in the Historic District; Folly Beach surfers; a sweetgrass basket.

Summer in the Lowcountry has obvious appeal: juicy Wadmalaw melons, shrimp boats with full catches, RiverDogs baseball at the Joe. What's better than a lazy summer morning at the beach followed by a shady stroll through downtown neighborhoods, topped off with rooftop sunset sips? Well, actually, as locals know, the very same thing in spring, fall, and winter—all are delightful in their own right. Thanks to a gentle year-round climate, our so-called "offseasons" are fully on, with the bonus of fewer people and less SPF.

Come fall, sunshine has a renewed luminous lure, a golden purity enhanced by lower humidity. In September and October, the marshscape's muted palette ignites with wispy purple sweetgrass and goldenrod. The redfish are jumping, and it's prime season for birders. Charleston's cultural and arts organizations launch their regular seasons, so there's plenty to do. Then the holidays bring their own sparkle with homes decked out in their seasonal finery. And just as February and March roll around, so do the Southeastern Wildlife Exposition and Charleston Wine + Food Festival. Never a dull moment.



Local Pro Tip

THE THING ABOUT OUR BEACHES IS...

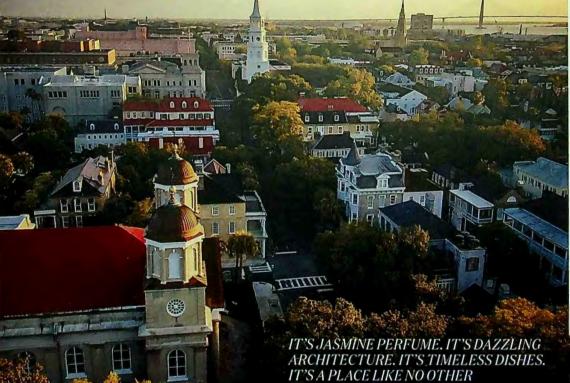
"Charleston's beaches are so special epic sunrises, epic sunsets."

Tia Clark Casual Crabbing with Tia

aLOVE



LETTER

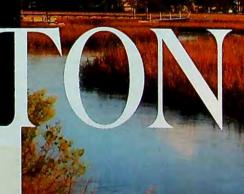




to

HARLESI

Clockwise from above: An aerial view of Charleston; raw oysters from the Ordinary; the marsh.



TEMPLE ST CLAIR



"Discovering Croghan's was like walking into a magical treasure trove."

Temple St. Clair

The Charleston Amulet Collection exclusively at

Croghan's Jewel Box

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Plus: LOCAL CHEFS DISH ON THE INGREDIENTS THAT DEFINE THE REGION

Charleston

SOUTH CAROLINA'S EXPECTATION-DEFYING DESTINATION FOR ALL SEASONS